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Napoleonic legend

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REFLECTIONS ON THE
NAPOLEONIC LEGEND

REFLECTIONS ON THE NAPOLEONIC LEGEND

By ALBERT LEON GUÉRARD

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A MON FILS
ALBERT JOSEPH GUÉRARD
POUR QU'IL GRANDISSE
DANS LE RESPECT DU JUSTE
ET LE MÉPRIS DES IDOLES

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FOREWORD

THE READER is requested not to seek in this little book more than it purports to offer. It is not a new life of Napoleon, an appraisal of his achievements, an interpretation of his character, or a philosophy of his mission. It is merely the reflections which occurred to a sympathetic observer of French affairs, as he traced through a whole century the enormous shadow of one man. †

It happens that some of these reflections are in agreement with the views of Mr. H. G. Wells. I am indebted to this charming writer for so many hours of romantic delight that I should be glad to acknowledge my obligation to him in this respect also. But, as a matter of fact, my opinions were formed years before the bard of Mr. Polly had turned his attention to more controversial subjects. There is no copyright in political opinions, else Mr. Wells himself would have to pay royalties to Madame de Staël, Chateaubriand, Auguste Barbier, Barni, Lanfrey—and even to the author of a *French Civilization in the Nineteenth Century*, which saw the light on the eve of the Great War.

The writer has made no attempt to draw from the events of a hundred years ago lessons applicable to our present perplexities. The set of biographical romances which goes by the name of History never repeats itself; it deals with individuals, and individuals are unique. Definite lessons would, therefore, be questionable, for there can never be another Napoleon I. General lessons are so obvious that they may be left unspoken.

RICE INSTITUTE,
March 24, 1923.

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“ Il faut en convenir, me disait aujourd’hui l’Empereur, les véritables vérités, mon cher, sont bien difficiles à obtenir pour l’histoire. Heureusement que la plupart au temps, elles sont bien plutôt un objet de curiosité que de réelle importance. Il est tant de vérités ! . . . Cette vérité historique, tant implorée à laquelle chacun s’empresse d’en appeler, n’est trop souvent qu’un mot : elle est impossible au moment même des événements, dans la chaleur des passions croisées ; et si, plus tard, on demeure, d’accord, c’est que les intéressés, les contradicteurs, ne sont plus. Mais alors, qu’est-ce que cette vérité historique, la plupart du temps ? Une fable convenue, ainsi qu’on l’a dit fort ingénieusement.”

Las Cases, Mémorial, 20 Novembre, 1816.

“ Quoi qu’il en soit, plus on s’est rapproché des instruments et des acteurs de cette catastrophe (la Révolution), et plus on y a trouvé d’obscurité et de mystère : cela ne fera que s’accroître encore avec le temps. Aussi la vérité de l’histoire, sur ce point comme sur tant d’autres, ne sera probablement pas ce qui a eu lieu, mais seulement ce qui sera raconté.”

Las Cases, Mémorial, 18 Novembre, 1815.

FIRST REFLECTIONS :

**ON HISTORICAL LEGENDS IN GENERAL; AND
WHETHER NAPOLEON EVER EXISTED**

I

HISTORY HAS BEEN DEFINED — with Napoleon's approval—"a pack of lies agreed upon." Whoever has attempted to chase that will-o'-the-wisp, *historical truth*; whoever especially has seen *historical truth* in the making, in the form of official reports, propaganda, journalism, must admit that there is a wealth of sense in that cynical remark.

Long before Einstein, historians had discovered the theory of relativity. The good old German scholar who declared that his sole aim was to state things "as they actually happened" belonged to a delightfully naïve generation. We never know things as they really happened; for all events have among their causes obscure states of mind which are impenetrable to the outsider. Nay, the very man who took a momentous decision could hardly tell, after a time, why he was impelled or inspired to do so. We are not even certain that things happened at all. All we know is our interpretation of records: what we think of what people thought had happened, our opinion of their opinion, or, in modern jargon, our reaction on their reactions.

A friend of mine is fond of quoting the truly honest writer who gave *An Impartial History of the Civil War: From the Southern Point of View*. There we had a man who frankly recognized the relativity of all historical literature! Hugo Münsterberg, the psychologist who was credited with the invention of a machine for detecting lies, noted that people expressed surprise because scholars in the belligerent countries could not agree about the "Truth." "I think," he said,¹ "it is a low view of

¹ In his book *To-morrow*, p. 37.

scholarly truth and a lower view of patriotism which misleads so many to such criticism. They fancy that truth is only a kind of photographic copy of an outer reality. They are not aware that every so-called truth is a remodelling of life impressions, a reconstruction of experience, a free creation of the intellect, which can never be severed from the purposes of the creating mind." "A free creation of the intellect" may seem an admirable definition of German truth in war times; but it applies no less aptly to the "official truth" upon which the Allied and Associated Powers were fed for several critical years. Why should ambassadors be singled out as men whose profession it is to lie for their country? Statesmen, journalists, and historians all belong to the same Club. The British had a ferocious saying: "There is no good Boche but a dead Boche." In the same way, the agencies which attempt to mould public opinion seem to act on the principle: "There is no safe truth but a dead truth." "Now it may be told" generally means: "It is too late."

The reader should not imagine for a moment that these remarks are offered in any spirit of flippancy or scepticism. They do not imply that all historians fall within one of the three categories: those who lie, those who are mistaken, and those who do not know. We are merely, long after Voltaire, Napoleon, and Mr. Trevelyan, attempting to define the field of history, without any slur upon her achievements in that field. And her field is the realm of Opinions, not of Events: Mankind in the Making is the Mind in the Making. It is a much vaster realm, and incomparably more entrancing. Shadowy? But opinions are definite facts in themselves, tremendous facts. It matters little now under what circumstances the *Maine* exploded; had the popular version of the affair been totally disproved, not one jot would be changed in the pages of history: there would be only a brief erratum, tucked away in the notes, as of trifling importance. Nations have lived spiritually upon myths, legends, and "vital lies." It can hardly be said that the diet has

proved beneficial. The Eternal Verities hymned by old Carlyle reassert themselves at times in cataclysmic fashion. But the cataclysm itself will soon be a cycle of legends ; and so *ad infinitum*, until this endless fabric of illusions be finally rolled up like a scroll.

History is made up of legends more real than facts, and of facts stranger than fiction. In that perplexing domain, some of the most enduring truths come to us tenuous and aerial, like the song of a secret bird ; whilst there are palpable lies that walk about in the sober garb of responsible scholarship. Every historical character is a Chimæra. The lion's body, the eagle's wings, the woman's face, are facts given by nature.¹ Their blending is the work of human hopes and fears. But the Chimæra lives a weird life of her own, and it is for her sake that men bleed and die. Who shall guide us in this eerie twilight of reality and fable ? Research will describe and restore to their respective owners the body, the wings, and the head ; but who will see the Chimæra entire, fall under her spell, and yet remain critically aware of her composite character ? What guides have we but sympathy and a sense of humour ? Or, in the words of Anatole France, Irony and Pity ?

II

Such a Chimæra is Napoleon : a myth, a lie, and a fact. The wonder is that the Chimæra was born, not in the haze of remote ages, but in the sober nineteenth century, under the critical eyes of our solid grandfathers. There are men now living, and not in senile decrepitude, Heaven thanks ! who know the Emperor directly from eye-witnesses. The present writer cannot claim to be venerable, yet he remembers the funeral of Victor Hugo, and Victor Hugo had seen Napoleon.

In the case of Napoleon, the word Legend is used as

¹ I confess that my Chimæra is no orthodox Chimæra, but . . . just a Chimæra. Strictly, it is Gustave Moreau's Sphinx.

a matter of course, by friend and foe alike, in all possible senses of that elusive term: a delusion—a fabrication—or truth simplified and magnified into an epic through the poetic power of the popular mind.

The Napoleonic cycle would not be complete if the very existence of the hero had not been challenged. There is a degree of greatness that verges on the incredible. Certain minds will not find rest until they have resolved Homer into an editorial committee, or proved that Shakespeare's plays were written by someone else of the same name. Many substantial characters in history have thus vanished into thin air. We are sceptical about the early rulers of Rome, King Arthur, or the Eleven Thousand Virgins who suffered death with St. Ursula. It seemed as though William Tell were not only real, but much more real than the Swiss of flesh and blood whom his heroism liberated; and lo! William Tell is a hoax, the figment of a ballad-monger, with a background of Nordic folk-lore. But Helvetia keeps him in the national Valhalla, the collection of her postage-stamps.

So far, Napoleon has stood the test: the consensus among experts is that he actually existed. But there is so much in his career that savours of the mythical that it is a positive scandal for safe and sane historians. We might as well fling away our petty rules of credibility. If Napoleon be possible, then the word impossible has no place in our vocabulary. Conservatives with a paradoxical turn of mind were not slow in availing themselves of this argument *ab absurdo*. It was done at least twice with conspicuous success.

Richard Whately, the future Archbishop of Dublin, wrote his *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon* when the world was still ringing with the crash of the French Empire. With singular penetration and cogency, he showed how the whole career of Napoleon strains honest belief. Between the alleged facts and the actual irrefutable evidence there is too great a discrepancy. A likely story, indeed, by all the canons of sound criticism! The little book is

no mere "jeu d'esprit," for there is a reconstructive purpose behind the paradox. *Per se*, it is a good piece of critical literature, which may be read with profit by prospective students of Napoleonic lore; for it is surprisingly well done, even in its confidence-inspiring ponderosity.

Compared with Whately's solemn fooling, the second skit offers in a high degree the Gallic quality of deftness. Its full title runs: *Comme Quoi Napoléon n'a jamais existé; ou: Grand Erratum source d'un nombre infini d'errata à noter dans l'histoire du XIXème siècle*; the author, Jean-Baptiste Pérès, otherwise unknown to fame. The first edition appeared anonymously in 1827, at a time when the people could hardly believe that Napoleon was actually dead. The pamphlet is a searching criticism of Dupuis's method in his *Origins of all Religions*. When you discover a new key to historical problems—whether it be race, sex, physiology, or economic factors—it is hard to resist the temptation of opening every door with your talisman. And all the doors actually do open: you can interpret the career of Moses in terms of Marxism, or that of Luther by means of the cephalic index. Only you soon realize that behind such doors, as in Lord Dunsany's allegory, there is naught but the inane—or else other doors, *ad infinitum*. Dupuis, who wrote at the time of the French Revolution, was a genuine scholar, and deserves to be remembered as a remote predecessor of Sir James Frazer. He had discovered one of those magic keys: all fabulous heroes, all founders of races, all creators of religions, were but symbols of the Sun, Solar Myths. The solar element in the Christian tradition is undeniable. Christmas and Easter are astronomical celebrations, which have their parallels in other faiths. Is it not evident, for anyone who has grasped the golden key, that Jesus never existed in the flesh, that He is a Solar Myth? More than a century after Dupuis, we have not heard the last of the *Christ-Mythus*!

Very well, thought Pérès, let us apply the same method to Napoleon. Let us note, first of all, his name, so rare

in history that it cannot be the result of mere chance : Napoleon, Ne-Apollo, the Sun-God. His mother's name was Lætitia, joy : the Sun, gift of Joy—what could be more natural ? He was born in an island, he died in an island ; and St. Helena is situated far to the west of Corsica : a clear allegory of the ancient belief that the Sun rose from the Ocean and sank again into the Ocean. He had seven brothers and sisters : the Sun's family, the seven planets known to the Ancients.¹ It is a great pity he did not limit the number of his Marshals to twelve—the twelve Peers of Charlemagne, the twelve Apostles, the twelve Tribes—all symbols of the twelve signs of the Zodiac. He succumbed at last under the efforts of Russia and England : Russia, which stands for the North and for Winter, the region and the season in which the Sun loses his power : England, the Ocean which was to engulf him. I doubt whether in Dupuis's ingenious and well-informed book we could find a more satisfactory explanation of a solar myth.

We have mentioned these venerable pleasantries not only because they give us, indirectly, a good lesson in method, but because they contain a kernel of truth. Napoleon, Corsican, general, First Consul, Emperor, prisoner, is not a myth. But the Man of Destiny, invulnerable, ubiquitous, omniscient, guided by his Star—that Titanic Shape which was ascending on the European horizon at the very moment when Whately and Pérès wrote their little satires—*that* is a myth, as plainly a myth as Perseus or Hercules, a myth which for a hundred years has been exposed, and yet never fully exorcised. Many reliable scholars to-day are busy clearing up details in the life of the historical Napoleon. But for the very reason that they are unimaginative and conservative, they leave the Myth undisturbed, just as Rollin never thought of challenging the accounts of early Rome. In all ages sensible men have blindly accepted indefensible customs, childish superstitions, and such monstrous institutions as human sacrifices, slavery,

¹ Including the Moon.

or war. They were so reasonable that they took all forms of unreasonableness for granted, like the course of the seasons. Paradox and iconoclasm are needed at times to restore common sense.

III

There are two ways for human imagination to transmute facts into legends: one is deliberate, the other unconscious; the first is fraud, the second symbolism. Fraud was the stock explanation offered by Voltaire for every character or event that transcended his experience. His *Essay on Manners*—an epoch in historical writing—is marred by the constant assumption that heroes in the past practised deceit, that even Joan of Arc “faked” miracles. His masterpiece in that line is the tragedy of *Mahomet*, which, with his tongue in his cheek, he piously dedicated to the Pope; and which His Holiness gratefully accepted with his blessing—and a wink, we must surmise.

We are less prompt to-day to be satisfied with this hypothesis. It is not necessary to suppose that clever tricksters were consciously fooling the people at every turn; the people are only too prone to fool themselves. History is a comedy, no doubt; but it is one in which the protagonists, as a rule, take themselves with tremendous seriousness. However, the reaction against Voltairianism should not lead us to shrug away altogether the possibility of downright cheater. French history offers one example at least of a plain fabrication which was immensely and lastingly successful—I mean the episode of the *Vengeur*.

It was in June 1794: a British fleet under Howe was attempting to capture or sink a vast convoy bringing food supplies from America to Brest. A French fleet, inferior in strength and in training, engaged the British and was defeated with grievous losses; but it achieved its end, for the precious convoy reached port in safety.

A French ship, the *Vengeur*, disabled, sinking, cut off from the rest of the line, refused to surrender. Her crew nailed the tricolour to the broken mast, fired a last volley when the lower deck was already under water, and went down to immortal death, defiant, singing the *Marseillaise*. Carlyle, in the first editions of his *French Revolution*, described the scene as though he had been an eye-witness. The sailors of the *Vengeur* have their monument in the Pantheon, and there is no child in France who could not tell their story, in prose, in verse, or in song.

But, in 1838, Admiral A. J. Griffiths saw fit to challenge Carlyle's version of the affair. As fourth Lieutenant on the *Culloden*, he had taken part in the engagement. The *Vengeur* made a gallant fight; but she had to strike her colours at last. Hundreds of her crew were rescued, nothing loath, by the boats of the *Arthur* and the *Culloden*. For an hour before she sank not one shot had been fired against her; and her Captain, brave Renaudin, was in his victor's cabin, eating cold mutton pie with pardonable voracity, when the hulk of the *Vengeur* finally disappeared beneath the waves.

This version was so totally at variance with the one which had been accepted for nearly half a century, on both sides of the Channel, that Carlyle could not believe his eyes. Yet it was confirmed by all official reports, French as well as English, whereas not a particle of evidence was found to support the traditional account. It even came to light that in 1838 there were still a number of sailors of the *Vengeur* alive—and starving—who, I dare say, would gladly have pawned their immortal halo for a pittance in this world. Carlyle does not tell us what became of these embarrassing ghosts. (We wonder if the survivors from Thermopylæ formed themselves into a Legion to wrest a dole from reluctant Sparta?)

What had happened? Simply this: It fell to the lot of Barrère to announce to the Convention the sea fight off the coast of Brittany. Now, Barrère was a man who absolutely agreed with Münsterberg: patriotic truth should be a free creation of the intellect. He also believed

with the modern theatrical manager that we must give the public what they want. In Thermidor he is said to have had in his pocket a speech in favour of Robespierre and one against him. He started reading the first, saw that the wind had turned against the tyrant, and calmly pulled out the second.¹ He knew as well as any writer of *communiqués* in our own time that the public do not relish defeat: the Germans have not been told officially to this day that they have lost the battle of the Marne. But a bulletin of victory would have been too palpable a lie. So Barrère picked out a true episode, and garnished it with such skill that the Convention received the news with enthusiasm. There are few better examples of camouflage and "bourrage de crâne."

It is amusing to read, in standard French histories, the episode of the *Vengeur*. Responsible authors are careful not to commit themselves to Barrère's transcendent *gasconnade*. But they are no less chary of any word which might destroy the long-cherished legend. So they praise, in glowing and evasive terms, the heroism of the Republican sailors—and everyone is pleased. We are reminded of certain liberal theologians, who speak of "Jesus's triumph over Death" in such a way that the higher critics are placated whilst the orthodox are not shocked.

We do not mean for a moment that Napoleon's glory is a tissue of lies. But we must not forget either that he was his own Barrère. His official press, his Proclamations, his Bulletins, his Memoirs, his monuments: all propaganda, on an imperial scale. And, like Barrère, he might have had two speeches in his pocket. "Il acheva la Révolution," which means, at your pleasure, that he completed, or that he suppressed it.

IV

Lies—but we beg to withdraw this coarse word: let us say "free creations of the intellect"—are not

¹ Another legend, very probably. But certain it is that Barrère acted as though he had prepared alternative speeches.

invariably barren ; and their progeny may not be short-lived ; the false Decretals enjoyed a career of many centuries. In other terms, it is possible to fool a great many people for a very long time. But deliberate fabrications are not the most fruitful sources of legends. Much more important is the spontaneous travail of the popular mind. Any truth or untruth may serve as a nucleus : the result is the materialization of a haunting fear or desire, the exaggeration of events to which Fate imparts symbolical value, particularly the transformation of a process or of a cause into a Man. The same poetic force that created gods and demons created heroes. It was shaping myths at the dawn of civilization : it is not exhausted to-day.

A curious book has been written, and could be indefinitely expanded, about the false news, legends, and superstitions of the Great War. Thousands of people were convinced that an army corps of Cossacks had been transported to the Western front in time for the battle of the Marne. General Hector MacDonald, who committed suicide in Paris, reappeared as frequently as the false Dmitri of Russian history. Kitchener had a number of avatars. Lenin had more lives than all the cats in Christendom ; and we know how persistent, even in reputable papers, was the base story about the socialization of women in Soviet Russia. All these tales were the " exteriorization " of hatred or hope. If you attempted to run them down, you found that the men who repeated them most assertively had them on the authority of someone else, to whom it had been told by the friend of an eye-witness. The actual eye-witness was as hard to find as the man who is ultimately responsible for the high cost of living.

The same faculty creates monsters as well as heroes. In some cases they are the same—viewed from a different angle. The Pope, to millions of earnest believers, is no longer a mere man, but the Vicar of Christ on earth : in good old-fashioned Protestant households he was held to be, until very recent times, a horrific personage, the incarnation of all evil. An admirable writer, a well-meaning and curiously moderate thinker, P. J. Proudon,

achieved, and rather enjoyed, such a sinister eminence in 1848. At the height of his career Napoleon also was the hero of a Satanical legend in England: Boney was the Antichrist, and there were several different ways in which the letters of his name could be made to total six hundred and sixty six, the number of the Beast.¹ This side of the Legend has disappeared practically without a trace. No foreign writer, and, in France, no rabid Republican or hidebound Legitimist, would maintain to-day that Napoleon was wholly evil. Even those who retain the most monstrous accusations against him—incest, for instance—realize that it was through something else than crime that Napoleon achieved supremacy. The exaggerated importance given to evil characters is a delusion. Once more, the world may be a tragedy or a comedy, as you choose: it is not a melodrama. Villains are not dyed so deep in life as on the stage; no devil is quite so black as he, or she, is painted.

The curious thing about this tendency to magnify individuals is its apparent capriciousness. Not all heroes and geniuses are thus surrounded with a halo of legend. Washington is justly revered; but, except for the incident of the cherry tree, he is soberly historical. Lincoln, on the contrary, much closer to us in point of time, is becoming the centre of a legendary cycle, like Alexander and Charlemagne. Men who have barely reached middle life are conscious of the transformation. Thirty years ago Lincoln was a great name in politics and history, although still a sectional rather than a national hero; to-day he is in Valhalla. His grandest memorial assumed quite naturally the form of a temple. To deal with him in the same spirit and in the same tone as you might deal with President Arthur would not merely be a breach of taste: it would be resented as a sacrilege. Leave Lincoln entirely to literature, art, and folk-lore for a few generations, and you may be sure that cubits will be added to his stature, all the proverbial wisdom of his age will be

¹ Pierre, the hero of *War and Peace*, indulges the same fancy for a while.

ascribed to him, miracles and portents will be recorded. Lincoln is no longer Lincoln : he is Democracy, Emancipation, National Unity. President Wilson, at the height of his power and glory, was never "legendary" in his own country, but Theodore Roosevelt was.¹ M. Poincaré, dignified, alert, fearless, intensely patriotic, did not become the centre of a legend during his war Presidency. Clemenceau, on the contrary, appealed to popular imagination, and our great-grandchildren may repeat weird stories of the Tiger. There is the same gambling success in history as in literature. Some creations walk straight out of the printed page, and can never die ; other characters, nobler, more subtle, and more accurately defined, perhaps, somehow fail to take hold of the public mind. Abbé Prévost was a mediocre hackwriter ; but *Manon Lescaut* will outlive many generations of Academicians. There are saints and sinners, heroes and rascals, who become personal acquaintances to the million. Others, just as good or just as bad, are never more than a name. Fascination is not the reward of virtue ; it may not even be the result of greatness, be it good or evil. This undefinable magnetism undoubtedly belongs to Napoleon. As might be expected, it lost much of its potency at close range. No man is a hero to his valet, especially to such valets as Fouché and Talleyrand. Beyond a certain zone in space and time it was wellnigh irresistible.

When a man has become "legendary," miracles are expected of him and credited to him as though they were a matter of course. The boundaries of the marvellous and the real are very shadowy ; for the masses of mankind, including the present writer, the achievements of modern science are past comprehension and stagger belief. I believe in ions, because the men who bid me believe can perform undeniable wonders ; we might as well

¹ A Wilsonian legend was taking shape in Europe at the time of the Armistice ; but it did not survive the first few meetings of the Peace Conference. Needless to say that no disparagement is implied in the statement of this plain fact. It never was President Wilson's desire to become "legendary."

believe in Napoleon's star upon similar evidence. Who shall set limits to wizardry? The French have such a preternatural character in Turpin, the inventor of Melinite. His chief claim to glory was that an enlightened Government imprisoned him as a reward for his services. This real melodrama of virtue persecuted started the Turpin legend. For a number of months, at the beginning of the war, you could hear whispers about Turpin's amazing secret. He had invented an explosive which, silently, would strike thousands into instantaneous and rigid death. Germans had been seen—by whom?—thus smitten by an invisible hand, caught as by a camera in the midst of a familiar gesture. Some pinned a similar faith to Mr. Edison. How many Americans, at one time, expected Mr. Hoover to repeat the miracle of loaves and fishes? How many thought that Mr. Henry Ford, single-handed, could disentangle the prodigious Laocoon coils of the railroad situation? In the case of these very human, and humanly limited, gentlemen, genuine appreciation was ready to overstep at any moment the limits of the possible, and to turn into superstition. That is why the reader of Napoleonic literature would do well to keep Whately at his right hand and Pères at his left. Their little sardonic chuckle will wake him up when he nods into mythical dreams.

The study of the Legend, as a legend, might very well be the centre of Napoleon scholarship. This does not imply an attitude of scoffing scepticism—the most unprofitable that the historian could assume. Napoleon the hero of an epic cycle is no less fascinating than Napoleon the leader of armies or the dictator of Europe. The Emperor himself said that he prized the Civil Code more highly than Austerlitz. In the same way, and without sacrilege, we may be led to assert that his most marvellous achievements were his proclamations and memoirs; that his greatest victory was the battle of Saint Helena; and that to foster a Legend is a rarer prodigy than to dictate a Code or win a campaign.

The result, at any rate, is more enduring. The Emperor

and the Empire are dust, the Code is obsolete, the Legend soars eternal. For the success of legend and campaign alike the co-operation of untold factors is needed, especially the consent of that Power whose smile is faintly seen through the veil of Fate. It will be our endeavour to indicate a few of these factors ; and some—men, motives, or incidents—are paltry enough. But this should detract very little, in the eyes of fair-minded men, from the unique fascination of the hero. Rather does it add to our wonder that such dazzling results should have been obtained with means frequently so trivial and so unworthy. The fundamental facts remain these : He believed, and he made people believe, that his purpose was their purpose ; he stood alone and so high that they could mistake his lengthened shadow for that of Destiny itself. A conscious fraud ? A delusion ? Who knows ?

BOOK I

THE FACTS OF THE CASE

Chapter I

"FIRST IN WAR"

I

THERE IS IN MANY MINDS a craving for esoteric knowledge. Hallowed traditions, avowed policies, declarations of principles, are well enough for the gullible Many. The Chosen Few, the Smart Set among students of human affairs, must peep behind the scene, watch the demigods who are pulling invisible strings, and overhear their whispered secret. The "inside story," the haunting dream of the journalistic mind, may be just a trivial bit of scandal, or it may be a newfangled scientific theory; provided it be the opposite of what the general public know and believe, it will serve. Balzac, with all his massive intellect, and his no less massive vanity, held it as a cardinal truth that things are never what they seem to the vulgar herd. He had new lights on the policy of Catherine de Medicis, and would hint darkly that, for those "in the know," Fouché rather than Napoleon was the great weaver of Europe's destiny. It is this appetite for a truth more choice than the common fare that prompts the exploder of myths. We would love to believe that history is a grand hoax perpetrated on the vast majority of mankind, and that we alone, or almost alone, were not taken in.

Nothing of the kind will be found in the following pages. The orthodox reader may open them with a feeling of absolute security: his standards will not be challenged. As Henry IV entered some small French town, the usual salute was not forthcoming, and the

Mayor offered his apology in these terms : " Sire, we did not fire a gun for three reasons. The first is that we have no gun." Our first reason for not questioning the accepted facts of Napoleon's career is that we have not the slightest claim to rank as a Napoleon scholar. Like everybody else, we have felt the fascination of the Legend—else we should never have dared to discuss it. With untold thousands, we have read, from early childhood, innumerable books concerning the Corsican. But this gives us no place even at the feet of Masson, Chuquet, Houssaye, or Vandal. The second reason is that we are somewhat sceptical about esoteric history. It is true that things are never quite what they seem. When Rouher, the Vice-Emperor, was praising the Mexican expedition as " the grandest conception in the reign " of Napoleon III, a few confidants of de Morny might have said under their breath : Jecker. Voltaire and Scribe would have us believe that the Treaty of Utrecht was the consequence of a glass of water spilt on a lady's dress ; and Parisian gossip insisted that the Franco-German conflict over Morocco was brought to a head because a very patriotic politician loved too expensively. Still, taking it by and large, such anecdotes may explain *How* things happen, but seldom *Why* they happen. The broad facts, the universally familiar facts, remain the capital facts.

We shall not therefore attempt to write another life of Napoleon, and " tell the truth at last." About the details of his career, specialists will labour as long as our civilization endures ; but it seems unlikely that the outlines will change. We shall take for granted this common knowledge about Napoleon. We shall also take for granted his ineradicable prestige. And our problem will be this : do the facts, as everybody knows them, fully warrant the prestige, as everybody feels it ? Is there no discrepancy between the apparent cause and its effect ? If there be such a discrepancy, what is it that came in between ? This simple subtraction—the prestige minus the facts—gives a remainder : the Legend.

A first fact about which no doubt is permissible is

that Napoleon had not a single drop of French blood in his veins. This would not prevent him from loving the French. Is it not written over the bronze gates of his tomb: I wish my remains to repose on the banks of the Seine, amid that French people I have loved so well? A gentleman may love his horses! He was born in Corsica, just at the time when the little island, against the sacred principle of self-determination, was purchased by Choiseul like any piece of real estate. He spoke at home the Corsican dialect; then he learned Italian. French was to him a foreign language, France a foreign country. His father, ailing and needy, had sold his influence to the French side; but his influence was not great, and he never was paid in full. So young Napoleon remained a Corsican patriot, even when he was wearing the colours of King Louis XVI. He intrigued for and against Paoli, the national hero of his people; and did not give up dreams of Corsican independence, even with the assistance of the British, until he saw the hopelessness of the cause, and descried a more promising road to his own advancement. The apostles of French nationalism, like Maurice Barrès, will find it hard to enroll Bonaparte under their standard; his land was not their land, his dead were not their dead, his soul was not their soul.

He was admitted to a military school, where his puny frame, his foreign accent, his sombre pride, and his poverty, were not calculated to make him popular. He could not but reflect that, in the aristocratic body of officers which he was entering, he would remain a black sheep; and that well-born fools whose parents appeared at Versailles would be promoted over his head. So we can hardly expect to find in him any trace of loyalty to his King or to his caste; the bread they were throwing to him was too scant and too bitter. But it would be a mistake to consider him as a man of the people, like Lazare Hoche. Desperately poor, he was none the less a nobleman. He was trained in the old army, which lived, like all professional armies, upon the most thoroughgoing anti-

democratic prejudices ; between the officer and the riff-raff cajoled or coerced into the ranks there was an abyss. At no time had Napoleon a chance of communing heart and soul with the new ideal. His experience had simply destroyed in him, at an early age, any superstition about caste or country. Circumstances and his own temperament made him an adventurer, ever looking for the main chance. The world was his oyster.

We do not forget that he wrote turgid revolutionary pamphlets, like *Le Souper de Beaucaire*. Self-centred though he be, he could not help, at the impressionable age of twenty-three or twenty-four, being affected by the electric atmosphere that surrounded him. A current was flowing swiftly at his feet ; he launched his little bark and rowed with the tide, trusting it would carry him, whither he knew not, but far from his present obscurity. He was a Jacobine when it served his purpose ; he was the friend of the Robespierre brothers in the same way as he was later a Mussulman in Egypt. The Revolution meant absolutely nothing to him, except the removal of barriers to his ambition. When the Revolution had given him all that he could hope, when it became an obstacle in his path, he pushed it roughly aside. In many circumstances he boasted that he had not fulfilled but destroyed the Revolution. This is not incompatible with the fact that he seemed, and to a large extent actually was, the soldier of Democracy ; but it was because at the time Democracy was the highest bidder. As soon as heredity and privilege served his turn better, he surrounded himself with titled lackeys, and made himself "the nephew of Louis XVI."¹ Of genuine political convictions we find in him no trace. Neither King nor country, neither liberty nor equality were his gods.

He had no god but his ambition. It is a truism to repeat that his ambition was the cardinal fact in his life. To his ambition everything was a tool : France,

¹ When he first referred to Louis XVI as "my uncle," his courtiers, although used to prodigies, were taken aback : but was he not the husband of Marie Antoinette's niece ?

democracy, religion, even war itself—for Napoleon would have made peace and preserved peace, had peace enabled him to gamble for as high a stake as war. There was in it a touch of romantic madness, which made him hanker unceasingly after the magic Orient, and long for the unattainable. As fierce a passion had burned within the breast of many fanatics, down to his contemporaries, Robespierre and Saint-Just; but it was always blended with an ideal. Napoleon's ambition alone was pure, self-sufficient, undiluted by sentiment or scruple; concentrated, corrosive, terrible, but not commonplace.

His ambition was greater than his love for war; but war was the very air he breathed, and when he tried to be a civilian ruler, he was still haunted by the military ideal: immediate efficiency and material order.¹ He must needs have Church and University stand in parade formation, and wait silently for his word of command: for, as he had received no education but that of a soldier, he could have no other point of view but that of a soldier. Remember that he never had any country, any home, except a military school and a regiment. His sword was his talisman. He had thought of serving in Turkey or in India: whatever country would offer opportunities to a soldier was his country. He was a soldier of fortune *in excelsis*. Taine defined him a belated Italian *condottiere* of the *Cinquecento*. He was the younger brother of these men by blood: a Corsican of Tuscan origin; and his energy at the service, not of a cause but of a personality, is naught but the *virtù* of a Cesare Borgia, as lauded by Machiavelli. A single passion, all internal checks atrophied, all external checks removed by a prodigious concurrence of events: such was Napoleon. At a critical moment on the 18th of Brumaire he used these words, which might have been ludicrous, and which were prophetic: "I am accompanied by the God of Fortune and of War."

¹ His dictum, "J'ordonne ou je me tais," selected as an epigraph by Elie Faure, is a commonplace of the drill-ground

II

Let us examine this God of War, then, in the cold, clear light of Voltairean common sense, brushing aside, for a moment, the prestige which usually paralyses our reasoning. It is a dangerous undertaking for a layman to comment on Napoleon as a leader of armies. Chateaubriand made himself exquisitely ridiculous by his famous declaration: "Napoleon's military glory? It is torn away from him. He knew how to win battles; apart from that, there is no commonplace general that is not more skilful than he."¹ Technicians in the art of war, for a century, have based their doctrine upon the study of his campaigns. Generals who professed to be the disciples of Napoleon have won victories over generals who, to be sure, were likewise the disciples of Napoleon; so, whatever the issue, his prestige was secure. It would be as foolishly presumptuous for the non-specialist to pit his opinion against that of the experts, as it was presumptuous to challenge from without the authority of schoolmen, theologians, and diplomatists. The reader may be sure that we shall not venture upon technical military ground. We are perfectly willing to accept on faith that the Italian campaign in 1796 and the campaign of France in 1814 are the unsurpassable masterpieces of military genius. In so far as war is an art for its own sake, the practitioners thereof are alone qualified to have

¹ *De Buonaparte et des Bourbons*, March 30, 1814. We are not called upon to defend Chateaubriand, who, like the thorough romanticist that he was, revelled in absurdities. His *De Buonaparte et des Bourbons* adds to the fine frenzy of the poet the less lovely ravings of the partisan, and cannot be taken more seriously than Hugo's *Napoléon le Petit*. However, the statement is not quite so foolish as it appears in its truncated form. Chateaubriand makes his meaning clear a little later. Napoleon secured tactical rather than strategic advantages. This seems in plain contradiction with the facts, since many of Napoleon's victories, Austerlitz, Jena, Wagram, were decisive. But it was true that in 1812, 1813, 1814, and in the Spanish War, Napoleon was gaining battles and losing campaigns. In the perspective of history, which it is the part of the poet to anticipate, Napoleon's career appears as one long losing fight full of stirring episodes, which led inexorably, from triumph to triumph, to irretrievable disaster.

an opinion. But if war be a means to an end, if it occupies a definite place in a larger scheme of things, then even the man in the street may see its broad results and judge of its success. It is therefore just as legitimate for a student of history to discuss Napoleon the general as it is to discuss Colbert the administrator and Metternich the diplomatist. Even in the question of Napoleon as the God of War, we are justified in pointing out the element of legend. Miraculous as his career may be, it has artificially been made more miraculous still. And a greater miracle has thus been sacrificed, because it was not incarnated in a single hero.

The common conception is that France would inevitably have succumbed, had not Napoleon's genius saved her on the brink of the abyss. It is this vague and persistent impression that we must challenge. In 1793 the situation of France was desperate indeed. The whole of Europe was in coalition against her; one-third of her territory was in open rebellion against the Central Government. Throughout the part of the country controlled by the Republic a large proportion of the population was in sympathy with the foreign aggressors and with the rebels. Even in the capital, royalism, driven underground, was ceaselessly intriguing. In Paris there ruled the most amorphous Government: the collective, irresponsible dictatorship of an assembly hopelessly divided against itself, and in constant danger of being invaded by the mob. The republican leaders were sending one another to the guillotine, because, forsooth, they were “exaggerated” or else “indulgent.” Scientists were executed, like Lavoisier, or hunted to death like Condorcet. Trained officers had deserted almost in a body, and were carrying arms against the Convention. Those who had remained at their posts were under suspicion, and several were sent to the scaffold. The volunteers called in 1792 behaved as raw recruits will almost invariably behave, whatever may be their personal courage and devotion: at the first attack they fled in a panic, shouting: We are betrayed, and shot their officers. It seemed as though only a

miracle could save France and the Revolution. And the miracle did happen.

France was saved partly by the mutual jealousy and distrust of the Powers banded against her. She was saved because vast flocks of the vultures left her to swoop upon Poland, an easier prey. But she was saved also by a miracle of energy and organization.

To meet an unheard-of emergency, a new kind of war was evolved. To the small, highly trained forces of the Prussian type were opposed levies on an unexampled scale—fourteen armies and twelve hundred thousand men. The veterans of the old regime and the recruits of the new were amalgamated, blending experience with enthusiasm. Discipline was restored, intelligent and rigorous. Officers were picked out from the ranks or from civil life. Hoche, a sergeant, found himself at the head of an army at twenty-six. It would have been suicidal to match these untrained hordes, these improvised officers, against the masters of the craft at their old game, learned and cautious, of strategic chess. So the young revolutionary giant, whilst Austrian and Prussian champions were smilingly watching for the next move, grabbed the old chess-board and smashed it on their venerable heads. Revolutionary tactics, revolutionary strategy, guided the revolutionary army. And the victory was not one of sheer numbers or brutal courage alone. Science was pressed into service. Quicker processes provided arms and gunpowder for the eager masses. The semaphoric telegraph of Chappe, the captive balloon, gave miraculous wings to the young Republic. The war was a crusade of fraternity and justice; and, as in the glorious group of Rude, the spirit of the Marseillaise hovered above the marching hosts.

The result was the greatest epic of war that the world had yet seen. In two years the barefooted armies of the Republic had conquered on all frontiers. By 1795 the back of the coalition was broken. Prussia and Spain were suing for peace. France had won the ancient frontier of Gaul, the left bank of the Rhine. She had won it

by the triumph of her arms, and she won it again by the justice of her cause; for the next twenty years the Rhinelanders were faithful members of the French family, faithful even in the hour of trial, at a time when others wavered, who had lived for five centuries under the sceptre of the Capetians. In two years the Convention had won what the Kings had dreamt of for half a millennium—what Napoleon was to lose again after draining Europe of her purest blood.

The most miraculous element in that military miracle is that it is anonymous. That is why English or American imagination so obstinately refuses to be fired by it. The central character, the "Organizer of Victory," the man who called into existence the fourteen armies of France, and hurled them against reactionary Europe, Lazare Carnot, is no fit hero for a legend. There is nothing flashy about that modest, hard-working captain of Engineers, capable, no doubt, of risking his life on the battle-field in order to encourage wavering troops, but condemning himself, as a rule, to the obscure travail of co-ordination in his Paris office. So he who invented modern warfare, and made Frederick II almost as antiquated as Alexander of Macedon, he who wrested victory from rout, he who forged the instrument for the great conqueror, is, beyond the frontiers of France, all but forgotten. We must add that he would have been the first to disclaim any unique share in the collective effort; he, his immediate associates, the Prieurs, Cambon, Jean Bon Saint André, the scientists, the young generals, the peasants in tattered blue coats and wooden shoes, all were the servants of a cause—a cause greater than France herself. So they had their reward and passed into oblivion.

Once more, the critical years, the miraculous years, were 1793, 1794, 1795. By that time a tradition had been formed, a generation of officers had been tried and trained. The heroic mob that rushed helter-skelter to defend "the Fatherland in danger" had become a complex, accurate fighting machine; Europe had learned to

respect the ragged army of democracy. And by that time what had Napoleon done? At first he had shilly-shallied between the cause of Corsican independence and Jacobinism in France; he had intrigued, obscurely and unsuccessfully; he had served the Robespierres, and disowned them after their fall. He had at last had a chance to play a creditable but secondary part in a minor operation, the Siege of Toulon. Meanwhile Hoche, his elder by a few months only, had already commanded in chief. Of course there is no discredit for a youth of twenty-six in the fact that he had only attained the rank of brigadier-general. The point is that Napoleon did not play a leading or even an important part in the dramatic recovery which changed France from a country on the eve of dissolution to the greatest military power in Europe. All that he performed later with the instrument that Carnot had prepared was not so wonderful as the creation of the instrument itself, and the success with which it was used before the Treaty of Basel.

III

In October 1795 we find Napoleon Bonaparte, distrusted by the Government, in obscure technical employment at the War Office. A Royalist plot against the moribund Convention broke out. The best generals were at the front. Others, whose services might have been available, were under suspicion. For the decrepit Revolutionary giant was steering a devious course between Jacobinism and Reaction, and no one knew for certain who were his friends or his foes. Barras, the principal personage in the Thermidorian regime, was appointed General-in-Chief of the Interior. He needed a military man as his instrument, and he needed him at once. The young Corsican general happened to be on the spot, and too obscure, it seemed, to become a danger. So he was selected. The resistance of the Royalists was feeble, and the famous "whiff of grapeshot" near the

Church of St. Roch finally dispersed them. Carlyle descants on that incident as though the military had never been called upon to quell an insurrection. There had been many such whiffs before, and there were to be not a few more in the troublous annals of nineteenth-century France. But this one started echoes which reverberate to this day.

Napoleon had his chance at last; he was entering history, although it was through a back door of no savoury repute. For he had become the right-hand man of that clever and sinister character, Barras, who took pride in his nickname, “ *le roi des pourris* ”—the rottenest of the rotten. The humble position of Bonaparte at any rate may be gauged by the fact that it was considered a great boon for him to receive the hand of Josephine, one of the Merry Widows of the Thermidorian carnival, and the discarded mistress of the all-powerful Barras. The young officer of fortune fell sincerely in love with the fading Creole beauty: and in her marriage portion was found the command of the Army of Italy.

Carnot had prepared a gigantic plan of campaign against Austria. Whilst Moreau and Jourdan were to reach Vienna by striking north of the Alps, Bonaparte was to march upon the same capital through the valley of the Po. In the mind of the great strategist it seems that the Italian campaign was destined to remain secondary, perhaps a mere diversion on a large scale. The economy of the plan was upset by the personality of the leaders: the Austrians had their best general in the north, the French theirs in the south. So the northern campaign was a failure, the Italian one a series of triumphs, and Bonaparte became in popular estimation not only the foremost of the French generals, but a worker of miracles. The present writer knows too little about military art fully to appreciate the wonderful series of manœuvres, bold and swift, through which the young commander defeated five armies outnumbering his own. But its general lines are eloquent enough even to the merest layman. One feels that a difficult art

has reached, in 1796 and 1797, its point of perfection. No other campaign gives us the same æsthetic pleasure.

It may seem futile and ungracious to suggest reservations. Unfortunately, that is what the critical student of history must train himself to do. The campaign justifies the most thoroughgoing admiration for Napoleon as a strategist: it does not justify the belief that his ability was miraculous or even unique. The only Austrian general who had learned anything about the new methods of warfare was engaged north of the Alps. Alvinzi, Kalkreuth, Würmser, were honourable Austrian warriors, true to the tradition of that country, which was to remain always a little behind the times. The Austrians were slow in realizing the shifting importance of the two campaigns, and they sent into Italy reinforcements which Napoleon was able to defeat in detail. He destroyed five armies without a general, and then dictated peace to a general without an army. In appraising the merits of a victory, it is necessary to consider against whom it was won, as well as by whom. The blunders of his opponents and his own genius were both necessary elements in his triumphal progress. Moreau and Jourdan had a different task to accomplish.

Furthermore, in comparing the failure of the northern campaign with the success of the southern one, we are apt to forget that only one of the Republican commanders, Jourdan, proved unequal to his task. Jourdan, whose career had been creditable rather than brilliant, was badly beaten. Moreau, left without support, doomed as it seemed to utter defeat, managed to extricate himself through a retreat which has remained a classic—a retreat in which he not only kept his army intact, but inflicted repeated punishment upon his pursuers. As soon as the troops were reorganized, Hoche and Moreau opened a new campaign, and their initial operations were as brilliant as anything that Bonaparte himself had to show. But the Preliminaries of Peace, signed at Leoben, arrested this magnificent beginning, and the casual reader still

thinks of Napoleon, at twenty-seven, as in a class by himself.

There is another aspect of the Italian campaign, which, as a lover of France, we should prefer to leave untouched. But it is a symptom which cannot be ignored. War, from 1792 to 1795, had, on the French side, a missionary tinge. This gave it a chivalric appeal rare in history, an appeal to which fair-minded Germans have not remained indifferent, from Goethe in 1792 to Karl Vossler in 1921.¹ That spirit was changing. For that change Napoleon was not responsible. It was not his fault if the generals, instead of being citizens arming for the spread of the Rights of Man, had become, most of them, professional soldiers, eager for promotion and pay, even for "graft" and loot, in the service of a corrupt and predatory Government. But Napoleon did nothing to check this spirit of brutal ambition. Far from it; true to his principle that no tool was to be despised when it could serve some purpose, he cynically appealed to it. His ringing proclamation on assuming command is worth remembering: "Soldiers, you are ill-clad, ill-paid: I am going to lead you into the richest plains in the world, where all of you may find glory and fortune." The captain of a pirate ship could find no better words to encourage his crew.

The Italian expedition was not only a model of tactics, strategy, diplomacy, and good administration: it was also an example of systematic exploitation, of looting on a magnificent scale. In this domain the conquerors of Rumania in 1917 were the apt pupils of Napoleon. The Home Government needed it; there were moments when the cartloads of gold sent by General Bonaparte were the only thing that stood between the Directoire and immediate bankruptcy. Napoleon nursed or created

¹ "Truly," says Dr. Karl Vossler, "the French have not changed in the course of centuries. Just as then (at the time of the Crusades) they carried the Christian ideal through the world with fire and sword, they have, at the time of the Revolution and Napoleon, overwhelmed the world with war in the service of the ideal, 'Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.' Their best wars were in their minds missions of civilization and it is as such that they were waged."—*Frankreichs Kultur im Spiegel seiner Sprachentwicklung*, Heidelberg, 1921.

grievances against Powers which could afford to pay, such as the Pope or the Venetian Republic. It was a universal game of grab. But Napoleon liked efficiency even in thieves. Officers were allowed to "collect" only according to their rank, and contractors had to provide the army with suitable goods. The General-in-Chief himself was noted for his abstemiousness; he was already playing a deeper game. It was enough for him to know that there were in Europe plenty of talents and loyalties to be bought. He gambled heavily on the sordid side of human nature: where had "incorruptibility" led Robespierre and Saint-Just? And for many years he was not disappointed.

We may add that among his loot were a number of masterpieces, wherewith French museums were enriched until 1815. This again is an Italian trait: some of the *condottieri* were art lovers and art collectors. A true barbarian would not have appreciated the value of old paintings and statues. Pekin has seen a whole brood of petty Napoleons twice in a generation, in 1860 and in 1900.

His next military venture was a piece of romanticism which should have proved his undoing, and yet served his Legend almost as potently as his Italian victories. He took a French expedition to Egypt: perhaps there were some Machiavellians in high places who were delighted to see him go, and whose secret desires very nearly came to pass. The conception was grandiose and baseless. No doubt Egypt is the pivot of the ancient world, the strategic key to the East, as Saint Louis and Leibniz had realized centuries before Lord Beaconsfield. But the conquest of Egypt, by a small army, and without the control of the sea, was bound to be futile. And so it proved to be. Napoleon was hemmed in on the banks of the Nile. He tried to invade Syria, and was checked by one of his old schoolmates. The East was barred against him; all that Bonaparte could hope was to found in Egypt a local military domination, similar to the very Mameluke regime that he had overthrown. He was

already coquetting with Islam, and we might have had a turbaned Napoleon-Bey in Cairo instead of an Emperor in Paris. Baffled in his dream of rivalling Alexander, Napoleon quietly abandoned his army to its fate and sailed for Europe. Kleber maintained himself heroically; but he was assassinated, and his successor, Menou, had to capitulate. No fiasco could be more complete, and, for the general who deserted his post, more shameful. The expedition had later a magnificent by-product: it made Egyptology a French science for several generations, and led to the deciphering of the hieroglyphics. This, however, would hardly be accepted as an excuse in a military court.

Yet the fame of Napoleon was enhanced by this expedition. The prestige of the East, as he had rightly anticipated, gave him a halo. “Great reputations,” he would say, “are made only in the East.” Successful or not, the Egyptian raid was an adventure, a romance. It means something in the history of France that her soldiers should have fought in the shadow of the Pyramids, from whose heights, as Napoleon said, forty centuries were looking upon them.

His failure was distant, unsubstantial, poetic, redeemed by colourful episodes; the failure of the men who had to carry out the foolhardy policy of the Directoire was immediate, and fraught with tragic consequences. In two years, the Government, in its rake’s progress, had forfeited all the advantages of Campo-Formio. France was once more thrown upon the defensive; the immense front might break at many points; and Russia, the untried champion, vast and terrible, had at last joined the coalition. The memories of the Italian triumphs stood luminous against that murky present. Bonaparte to the rescue! He alone could save France.

The curious thing is that even in our own days the general public are under the impression that he did. In his absence, all went from bad to worse; he returned, and victory changed sides. Yet the actual facts are accessible—nay, familiar to all. Victory had changed

sides already. Masséna had broken the back of the coalition at Zurich. Suwaroff, defeated, and, in addition, resenting hotly the punctilious pride and the pedantic procrastination of his Austrian allies, was retreating, with no thought of coming to grips with the French again; Brune had compelled the Duke of York to capitulate at Bergen. It was not Bonaparte's return that altered the face of events; yet the man who had left his army behind was acclaimed, and is still acclaimed by posterity, as though it were he and not Masséna who had conquered at Zurich.

The tide had turned, but peace was not won. Masséna's stubborn resistance in Genoa enabled Bonaparte, now First Consul, to gather a new army, which, with wonderful skill and secrecy, he took over the Alps. This second Italian campaign culminated in the Battle of Marengo. Here, again, plain facts do not quite tally with the legend. Napoleon actually lost the Battle of Marengo, and Melas had already left the battlefield to spread broadcast the news of his triumph—the only time in history when an Austrian general acted with something approaching haste. Desaix, without orders, rushed in the direction of the cannonade. Everyone remembers the famous words: "It is three o'clock. The battle is lost. But we have time to win another." That second battle was won, and Desaix was killed. Destiny was kind to her favourite Bonaparte. She had removed Hoche, stricken with consumption, Kleber, assassinated in Cairo, Desaix, shot on the battle-field—the only generals, as Lord Rosebery remarks, that Napoleon ever praised wholeheartedly. It was reserved for Moreau to bring the coalition to terms through his victory at Hohenlinden: an obscure intrigue was soon to drive that last possible rival, at first to America, and finally into the ranks of France's enemies.

Under the Convention miracles were accomplished, but Napoleon was still obscure. Under the Directoire and the Consulate, he had forged to the front rank, but remained only *primus inter pares*, with such peers as

Hoche, Kleber, Desaix, Masséna, Moreau. His chief advantage over most of them was his craftier and more ruthless ambition; his decisive advantage over the three noblest is that they died and he lived.

IV

Marengo marks the end of Napoleon's normal career as a general in free competition with other generals. After that time no comparison was possible; the dice were too heavily loaded in his favour. Against his foreign rivals he enjoyed the tremendous advantage of being sole military and political ruler of a united Empire, whereas they were the instruments of a loose coalition. Before the Allies had time to put their heads together, agree upon a policy, and divide the prospective spoils, he was already knocking insistently at the gates of their capitals. It is evident that if Austria, Prussia, Russia, supported by England, had acted in concert in 1805, Napoleon's genius would have had an immensely harder task to accomplish. We know from recent experience the full value of unity of counsel and unity of command. Thanks to a superior degree of such unity, the Germans maintained themselves for nearly four years against overwhelming odds. When unity of command was at last accomplished, their doom was sealed, as inevitably as Napoleon's doom was sealed as soon as the Allies worked with one purpose.

With other French commanders, Napoleon would brook no comparison, even remote. Of the older men, Masséna, "Victory's favourite child," was the most formidable. Napoleon secured the grudging allegiance of the victor of Zurich by allowing him to loot to his heart's content, or almost to his heart's content, for Masséna, like his imperial master, was insatiable. But he was careful never to give him a chance commensurate with his genius. Brune was never forgiven for his victorious campaign in Holland. His memory remains smirched with the unproved allegations that Napoleon allowed to be

whispered against him. In 1806 the main body of the French army shattered the forces of Prussia at Jena; but at the same time, at Auerstaedt, Davoust was defeating an enemy outnumbering him. Of these twin battles, Auerstaedt is the more meritorious; but Napoleon scooped all the glory, and Davoust was henceforth kept in honourable but subordinate employment. The Polish crown, which seems to have been dangled before his eyes, came to nothing. It was not until 1815, when most of Napoleon's marshals had deserted him, that he gave Davoust's talents full scope; and even then he used him as an organizer, not as a fighter. In 1809, when the Emperor was held in check near Vienna—the decisive victory of Wagram makes us forget how critical the situation of the French had been—the British made a descent at Walcheren, in Holland. Fouché organized the national guards of the Empire, appointed Bernadotte as their commander, and said: "Let us prove to Europe that, although the genius of Napoleon may give lustre to France through his victories, his presence is not necessary for repelling the enemy." He was successful, but he had committed the one unpardonable sin: he had hinted that France could exist without Napoleon, and he was summarily dismissed. A burly new Chief of Police, introducing himself to his subordinates, boasted: "I can lick anybody on my force." A still burlier officer stepped forward and said: "You can't lick *me*." The Chief eyed him for a moment, and then waved him aside: "You are no longer on my force."

The result of this method was the surprising mediocrity of Napoleon's personnel compared with Carnot's. The older men were losing heart; a new generation of courtiers and bureaucrats was waiting to step in their shoes. Napoleon was supreme for fifteen years; the number of men he discovered and advanced is extremely small. Ney and Soult are, perhaps, the most prominent of the purely Napoleonic generals. Ney was brave and Soult was skilful, but neither of them could compare with Moreau, Masséna, Desaix, Kleber, and Hoche.

Winter and Providence have been blamed for the failure of the Russian campaign—Napoleon's infallibility remaining above discussion. Providence is inscrutable, but winter might have been foreseen. And if the Napoleon-worshipper offers as a further excuse the fact that his vast army was loose, heterogeneous, grumbling, with disaffected elements, and even germs of active treason, we may reply that the Grand Army of 1812 was of Napoleon's own making, and that he had thought it adequate for a campaign which was not forced upon him. The truth is that he had weeded independence and moral courage out of his staff, unselfish enthusiasm out of the rank and file. Worn out by twenty-five years of feverish activity, he had become sluggish, rousing himself from his drowsy spells only to give vent to fits of peevishness. He had acted for ten years the part of an Oriental tyrant; the vices and even the infirmities of an Oriental tyrant were creeping upon him.

We find in this campaign the limit, not of his luck merely, but also of his genius. He never had led before—no one had ever led in modern times—an army of six hundred thousand men. It would have taken a creative genius to meet the new conditions, and Napoleon's genius was not creative. He excelled in using standard tools; invention he scorned. He turned down Fulton, and was satisfied with the artillery of Gribeauval. He handled a horde of six hundred thousand men with the mental equipment which had served so well in his Italian campaign, and the mass proved unwieldly in his hands. He had never paid any adequate attention to supplies from the base. He was a careful administrator, and he had the welfare of his soldiers at heart; but it was his principle that war should be self-supporting, that the army should live on the country in which it was operating, and that the heads of subordinate units, down to the squad, could be trusted to shift for themselves. This worked admirably in Lombardy and in Germany; those lands were rich, and not fanatically hostile to the French. But the system, or absence of system, had already brought

him within an ace of disaster in the Polish campaign of 1807; it is only by a polite fiction that Eylau is still mentioned among French victories. In 1812-1813 that tremendous herd of reluctant men found itself in mid-winter in a hostile, devastated country, without a commissariat. For the hardships of the famous retreat Napoleon's lack of foresight alone was responsible.

He woke up, and was himself again, for the German campaign of 1813; it was in the course of that campaign, by the way, that he ordered everything destroyed on the right bank of the Elbe, "down to the last fruit tree"—a precedent which the Germans did not forget in 1916. The campaign of France in 1814 is by common consent even more marvellous than that of Italy in 1796. There again he defeated in detail several armies larger than his own. But the Allies had learned their lesson: they pressed on relentlessly, and, whilst gaining battles, he was losing the war. Fighting for dear life, his raw levies fired with patriotism and steadied by his veterans, on ground familiar to many of his officers, he was under the best conditions for surpassing his greatest achievements. We were rather surprised, therefore, when we read a lecture by Marshal Foch, then Lieutenant-Colonel, on the Battle of Laon (March 1814). The great professor of strategy, who was to disprove so conclusively the alleged antinomy between *teaching* and *doing*, analyses the causes of Napoleon's failure with pitiless objectivity: it is a "lesson" at the close of manœuvres, nothing else. And the Napoleon he evokes is not the demi-god drawing fresh vigour from the sacred soil upon which he is fighting: it is a Napoleon who hesitates, is poorly informed, and too sluggish to find out for himself the true situation of affairs; a Napoleon who allows himself to be engaged into a battle by the action of irresponsible lieutenants.¹

¹ Whilst reading these unadorned and fascinating pages (how few of his fellow Academicians write as well as Marshal Foch!) we were trying to remember: "Where did we come across something of the kind before?" It was in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. We had thought that the slighting account of Napoleon's military genius was a mere paradox, one of the few blemishes in that greatest of all historical novels: it was unexpected

The consensus of historians is that the Waterloo campaign was mediocre. Napoleon's former dash seemed utterly lacking. When his generals saw his sickly pallor¹ on that ominous morning of June 18th they had a vision of disaster. The absence of worthy lieutenants was tragically felt; but it was Napoleon who had wanted to be served by men like Grouchy.

What are the conclusions of this rapid survey? That Napoleon was not a great general? We trust that no reader will accuse us of such an absurdity. The quality of his army, the divisions and the slowness of his enemies, do not suffice to explain all his triumphs: men like Jourdan had held the same trumps in their hands, and lost the game. Napoleon was a virtuoso of war. He did not create his instrument, the new army; he did not write the tune—swift, massive attacks on vital points: both had been made ready for him by Carnot. In his twenty years of prominence, in his fifteen years of supremacy, he never produced a new method, a new weapon, or a new man. But he was a performer of supreme skill, and it is the performer, not the composer, who enjoys the plaudits of the public. Like most great masters of technique, he did not look forward. So, when he had an unprecedented situation to meet, in the Russian campaign, he broke down. We may wonder whether, even with railroads and wireless at his disposal, he would have been able to fill the place of Marshal Foch: ten million men to command, five million of them actually on the battle-line, four great allied nations to co-ordinate, several Parliaments eagerly watching him, and, opposing him, an enemy immensely superior in armament, training, and leadership to the coalition of 1814.

"He took France bankrupt, torn by factions, threatened with invasion; and, through the sheer magic of his genius, he made her the sovereign power in Europe." There is

to find Tolstoy confirmed by Foch (*La Bataille de Laon*, Mars 1814, conférence faite par le Lieutenant-Colonel (Maréchal) F. Foch, en 1903. *Revue de France*, 1er Mai, 1921).

¹ "Une figure de suif."

little doubt, in the mind of whoever reads dispassionately the well-known facts of the case, that this conception is a myth. Shall we say : " He sprang into prominence only after France, defeating all her foes, had reached the frontier of the Rhine, and when she had an army unexampled in numbers, discipline, and morale. So long as the impetus of the Revolution lasted, so long as his enemies were hesitating, divided, trammelled by antiquated military doctrines, Napoleon was able to carry on, in splendid style, the work of Lazare Carnot. When he had dried up all the founts of enthusiasm, when he had thoroughly discouraged initiative and fostered sycophancy, when his opponents had at last mastered the principles of the new strategy, he fell, and left France weary, body and soul, distrusted abroad, and much smaller than when he assumed power."

Chapter II

"FIRST IN PEACE"

I

AFTER TEN YEARS of revolution and seven years of war, France, in 1799, wanted no more conquest, no new glory, but peace. Both Napoleons, uncle and nephew, won their way to power on a peace programme: history abounds in such ironies. And there is no reason to doubt that both were sincere in their promises. Bonaparte, "God of Fortune and of War" though he styled himself, was ready to welcome peace, if through peace lay his upward road. So the First Consul appeared in civilian clothes, and a ceremony in honour of Washington seemed to imply a programme. He said later that he was more proud of the Civil Code than of any of his victories; and to this day the civic achievements of the Consul and Emperor find eulogists even among those who condemn his foreign policy.

"He saved the conquests of the Revolution, it is said, and he organized them. In 1799, so great was the disgust with the Directorial personnel, that a restoration of monarchy was in sight, and that restoration would then have meant a return to the Ancient Regime. Napoleon postponed the evil day for fifteen years. By that time the great principles of 1789 had taken root, and all the Bourbons in the world could not have eradicated them. In ten years the Revolution had destroyed many things, vaguely sketched many things, but established nothing. It was Napoleon who salvaged all that had any practical value out of that chaos of ruins and shattered dreams.

In a few months he gave France the robust framework which was to endure for at least a hundred years, and many parts of which are still in constant use: the Code, the Civil Service, the Legion of Honour, the University, the Concordat. Under Bourbon, Orleans, Bonaparte, and Republic alike, contemporary France has remained what Napoleon made her."

Such is the theory: we are all familiar with it, for it underlies nine out of ten of the books written about France,¹ even when the author does not believe himself to be a Napoleon-worshipper. To discuss it in an objective spirit is no easy task. Napoleon is a fact, and it seems futile to oppose any *might-have-been* to such an indisputable reality. On the other hand, have we any right to assume that the course of events was inevitably mapped out, because, forsooth, "all is for the best in the best possible world"? Such fatalistic optimism may be sound theology, but it is poor morality and shallow history. What cause would be worth fighting for, if whatever *is* were right?

As a matter of fact, it is the apologists of Napoleon who are dealing in *might-have-beens* when they claim that he saved France from a return to the Ancient Regime. All we know for certain is that he restored as much of the Ancient Regime as he could, and that he outdid Louis XIV in his absolutism. The danger from which he protected France is hypothetical; and we have a right, with the facts of the case at hand, to ask whether other hypotheses were not just as probable.

The most obvious of these hypotheses would be an 18th of Brumaire without Napoleon. The stage had been prepared by Siéyès and Barras; the cast knew their parts. Had the plotters selected just the right man—an efficient tool, but only a tool—we should have had a civilian regime, with Siéyès as its nominal head. To such a regime, Talleyrand, Fouché, and the whole personnel of the future Empire would undoubtedly have rallied; a little later, perhaps, conservative Liberals

¹ Notably the best of them all, Mr. Bodley's.

like Lafayette, and the best elements among the former Terrorists, like Carnot, would also have come in. The work of pacification and reorganization would have proceeded, without dramatic suddenness, but also with the serious advantages that a more deliberate discussion and less autocratic methods could offer. France would have conquered the Second Coalition just the same: for the worst enemy of Napoleon would not claim that he would have planned his second Italian campaign with less care and less skill, if he had remained a mere general, as he was in 1796. The defender of Genoa, the true victor of Marengo, and the victor of Hohenlinden, were all Republicans. The Treaties of Lunéville and Amiens would have been signed. Europe would have been less suspicious of a civilian Government than of a military dictator: peace might have been more durable. No doubt there is little in Siéyès and his crew to arouse our enthusiasm: France would have known, in 1799, the blessings and the tedium of a liberal, peace-loving, bourgeois regime, such as she was to enjoy—with a yawn—from 1830 to 1848, and again from 1875 to 1914; and M. Millerand might be the thirtieth President of a philistine Republic, instead of the eleventh.

Let us admit, however, that a civilian Brumaire would have been a failure, and that, willingly or not, it would only have paved the way for the return of the legitimate King. What would have been the consequences? We may take it for granted that by 1800, just as by 1814, the Bourbons would have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. It is the privilege, and as it were the distinctive seal of the Bourbon mind—and there are Bourbons under all climes and in all parties! A reaction there would have been: sporadic outbursts of White Terror, a few more regicides driven into exile or transported to Guiana. But that this reaction would have swept away the essential conquests of the Revolution is practically inconceivable. On the two major points—equality of all Frenchmen before the law, and confirmation of the new landowners in the possession of

their estates—the French people would have been unpromising. Louis XVIII understood this so well that he had given definite pledges to that effect in his secret offers to Bonaparte. Louis XVIII was still very weak in 1800, and revolutionary France was victorious. There was no party at home, and no foreign army, strong enough to impose him by force. He could have returned only as the result of an agreement with a large and influential group: then the Charter would in all likelihood have been both more liberal, and more binding, than in 1814. For, at the latter date, the King was supported at least by foreign bayonets, whilst the country was apathetic and demoralized.

It seems, moreover, that, narrow and shallow as the Bourbons were, they would soon have accepted the chief conquests of the Revolution without regret. The Kings were not committed heart and soul to the defence of any privilege except their own. It had been their constant policy under the Ancient Regime to curb the pretensions of both the nobility and the clergy, and to govern with the substantial middle class. The permanent results of the Revolution, those that had survived the fall of Robespierre, were absolutely in line with the historical development of the monarchy. 1789 was not a new departure, but a fulfilment. The colour of the flag must not mislead us: the Revolution would have been just as safe in the hands of Louis XVIII as in those of Napoleon. Representative government, at any rate, would have been a great deal safer. And France might be ruled to-day by Philip VII, succeeding as quietly to the throne of Louis XVIII as George V of England to the throne of George III.¹

There is nothing paradoxical about these hypotheses. What is paradoxical, on the other hand, is the contention that Napoleon saved Liberty by strangling her. "I took this man's watch and purse," said the conscientious highwayman, "because there was a footpad prowling

¹ In such a case, we may wonder what form the perverse and passionate logic of M. Charles Maurras would have assumed?

round the next corner who would most probably have stolen them. If he had to be robbed, he might as well be robbed by an honest man ! ” We fail to see that it was better for the Revolution to be killed by one of her own sons rather than by a representative of the Ancient Regime. Matricide has never been considered as an extenuating circumstance. Bonaparte played constantly upon the fear of a Jacobine danger, which he knew to be non-existent, and of a Royalist danger, which was a very mild menace compared with Bonapartism itself. It is not in comparison with these mythical perils, but on its own record, that Bonapartism should be judged.

II

The political institutions of the Consulate and the Empire need not detain us. They were a stately decoration of lath, canvas, and pasteboard that the Master allowed to be erected for the satisfaction of the spectators ; but he could at any moment shift, remove, or destroy any piece of the flimsy fabric. Napoleon did not create a regime that could survive him : all his constitutions were but a thin mask for his dictatorship. This was not intentional : he would have liked to give his Empire a permanent structure. In 1812 a false report of the Emperor’s death enabled General Malet to make a bold bid for power : he very nearly succeeded, and the fragility of the system was revealed. “ What ! ” said Napoleon with unfeigned indignation, “ is one man everything here ? Are institutions and pledged loyalty nothing ? ” They were nothing but shadows, because he had never allowed them to become anything else. He had his wish : he was everything. But he was alone.

The consent of the governed, that fundamental principle of democracy, was juggled away by one of the neatest tricks in constitutional history. Siéyès, whose reputation as a political oracle had been enhanced by his years of prudent silence, had proclaimed that “ confidence

must come from below, authority from above." According to that principle, the citizens were to select one-tenth of their number, and those names would form the *communal* list. They in their turn would select one-tenth of their number, and thus create the *departmental* list. The members of the departmental list at last would select one-tenth of their number, and establish the *national* list. Officials, judges, and even representatives were to be appointed, *from above*, out of the first, second, or third list, according to the importance of their functions—local, regional, or national. So no one could hold office unless his fellow-citizens had expressed in advance their general confidence in his fitness, and the doctrinal requirement of Siéyès was satisfied.

Even though this system gives more power to the Central Government than we believe to be compatible with genuine democracy, still it is defensible, and does lip-service, at any rate, to liberal principles. But it never was honestly applied. The members on those lists were elected for life: so there would be no further popular control, no elections except to fill individual vacancies caused by death. Other methods, more or less ingenious, were devised to stultify the national will, even if it could have manifested itself through so many obstacles. The whole personnel, political and administrative, was appointed by the Brumaire clique, Bonaparte, Siéyès, and their friends, before the three lists of notabilities had been prepared. So practically all that the electors had to do, during the fourteen years of Bonaparte's rule, was to designate, very indirectly, possible candidates for filling infrequent vacancies.¹

It is true that Napoleon retained from the Revolution the democratic instrument *par excellence*, the plebiscite. The different constitutions of the Consulate and the Empire were submitted to the ratification of the people.

¹ That cumbrous system was partly discarded, and a complicated form of indirect suffrage, with property qualification, was established. But even then, all that the electoral colleges could do was to designate two candidates for each vacancy among the Senators, legislators, or tribunes. It was the Senate that selected between the two.

But the conditions were such that the will of the people was never free to express itself, because there never was a possible alternative. France was placed before an accomplished fact. She could choose only between the men now in power or chaos. Such a plebiscite would prove little, even if it were honestly taken. Those of Napoleon's time proved even less. The votes had to be consigned on open registers: in certain villages we find as voting *Yes* long lists of names written by the same hand; in others, blank pages with the statement: *All approve*. Even with such methods, which left a free field for intimidation and fraud, the plebiscites of Napoleon did not secure for him a clear majority of the electorate (3,500,000 on the average, out of a potential 7,000,000). And, as if to make his contempt for this farcical consultation more evident, Napoleon set into motion the Consular Constitution before the results of the plebiscite had been proclaimed.

It might be entertaining to study the complicated mechanism of the four Consular or Imperial Assemblies: the Senate, practically appointed by the Master, and appointing in its turn the Tribunate and the Legislative Body; the Tribunate, which could discuss bills, but neither propose them on its own initiative nor vote upon them; the Legislative Body, a deaf-and-dumb assembly, which could only vote without a word; the Council of State, a company of competent, hard-working officials, entirely in the hand of the First Consul or Emperor, and without any political prerogatives. The Tribunate, powerless though it be, and subservient to Napoleon's desires, still represented a flicker of parliamentary liberty: it was first purged of its “dangerous” elements, then suppressed altogether, and never missed. The Legislative Body was more and more completely left out of the Government. Law-making assumed the form of *Senatus Consulte*, ratified with docility by the Senate, or of Decrees, which expressed purely and simply the will of the Emperor. Napoleon was too much of a realist not to be irked by the elaborate futility of the

façade erected by Siéyès. He was willing to let it crumble to the ground, revealing the permanent realities of the regime : an Army, a Bureaucracy, a Despot.

III

The political institutions of Napoleon were moribund before his fall ; they disappeared in 1814, and, when he returned from Elba, he did not attempt to revive them.¹ His administrative organization, on the contrary, endures—or is endured—to the present day.

French and foreign students of government are all of one mind about that once-vaunted system : it has been the bane of France for a hundred years, and the words “ *L’Administration que l’Europe nous envie* ” are never uttered without a bitter smile. All that the Napoleon-worshippers attempt to do is to plead extenuating circumstances. “ Napoleon,” they say, “ is not solely responsible for the excessive centralization from which France suffers. The Kings had been ruthless centralizers long before his day ; the Convention left very little initiative to the local authorities. With his infallible instinct for realities, Napoleon adopted a method of government faulty in itself, but suited to the temper and the traditions of the French people.”

This theory is highly disputable. No doubt the Kings had made constant efforts towards centralization. These efforts were needed : for France, under the Ancient Regime, was an aggregate of provinces, acquired slowly and piecemeal by the monarchy, and in which there prevailed a bewildering variety of dialects, weights and measures, customs, taxes, and laws. A man travelling in France, as Voltaire remarked, came under a new judicial system whenever he changed his horses. The King’s money, the King’s army, the King’s courts, the King’s appointed representatives or *Intendants* were so many agencies of simplification and order ; their progress,

¹ The words *Additional Act to the Constitutions of the Empire* are wilfully misleading : it was a totally new Constitution that Benjamin Constant wrote for him.

which was incessant but slow, was undoubtedly favourable to the interests of the country. The monarchy had not yet reached the point at which centralization becomes a curse. There were still many useless complications to be abolished, and there remained plenty of life and energy in the historical provinces. We shall see that conditions were altogether different when Napoleon came to power.

The Revolution, in this as in many other fields, wanted to complete at once the age-long, almost unconscious labour of the monarchy. Uniformity was decreed in a way which would have rejoiced the hearts of Louis XI, Francis I, Richelieu, and Louis XIV. The old provinces were abolished, with all their local traditions and privileges. New departments, all nearly equal in size, and all similar in organization, were carved out of them. In this the Constituent Assembly was inspired by its usual well-meaning and short-sighted radicalism. It would have been preferable, no doubt, to modernize the provinces, and to tone down their discrepancies only when they were too glaring. But time was pressing, and there were threats of disruption.

However, it was uniformity, or standardization, if you prefer, that the Revolution introduced, not centralization. On the contrary, as all the local units were now governed according to the same method, it was thought unnecessary that they should be too strictly dependent upon the central power. So all local authorities were made elective, and the new territorial divisions became practically autonomous.

The necessities of civil and foreign war compelled the Convention to use ruthless measures. The Government became a collective dictatorship; the network of Jacobine societies and the members of the Convention sent out on "missions" provided a rough-and-ready, unconstitutional and extremely effective form of centralization. But this was for war purposes only: as soon as the country was no longer in danger, and terrorism abated, the local authorities recovered their quasi-independence. Under

the Directorial Constitution there was an elected Directory of five at the head of each department, which thus became a miniature of the great Republic. The lack of co-ordination, which was the fault of the system inaugurated by the Constituent Assembly, had been felt. A remedy was attempted: in certain cases the central power assumed the right of suspending the elected officers of the department. This was crude, and further adjustments would no doubt have become necessary. The relations between the American Federal Government and the States are not quite the same to-day as they were in 1789. France would probably have remained more centralized than America, because her territory was smaller, and because she was in constant danger of foreign aggression. Still, a great deal of local self-government could have been retained—that self-government which may be all too often mean, wasteful, inefficient, and yet provides an incomparable school of alert, self-reliant democracy. And we must repeat that such a government was in no way contrary to the French temper or to French traditions, for there still lived memories of municipal or provincial “liberties.”

But after the 18th of Brumaire Napoleon destroyed, by a stroke of the pen, all possibilities of local autonomy. At the head of each commune was placed a Mayor, at the head of each “arrondissement” a Subprefect, at the head of each department a Prefect, *all appointed by the central power*, and responsible to that power alone. This was not merely a return to the centralizing policy of the Kings: it was infinitely worse. The Intendant of Richelieu was a useful check on the centrifugal tendencies of a province still imperfectly Frenchified, and a watch set upon the Governor, a great lord still imbued with feudal ideas, who might have made himself dangerous. The Napoleonic Prefect had no such peril to guard against: he presided over the artificial, standardized Department created by the Constituent Assembly. So the power of the Intendant was adequate; that of the Prefect was exorbitant.

What France needed, especially after the great upheaval, was a recrudescence of municipal and provincial life, so that the innumerable problems of the new social order might be settled gradually, through many diversified experiments, and so that the vast body of untrained citizens might serve its apprenticeship in local affairs. Napoleon thought otherwise. Once more his conception was that of the soldier: authority, unique, undisputed, descending irresistibly from above. The notion that the prerogatives of the First Consul or Emperor could find their limit in the constitutional rights of a city or of a department would have seemed as absurd to him as a claim to autonomy advanced by a squad or platoon against a colonel.

Ancient France needed, perhaps, more uniformity; Revolutionary France needed, unquestionably, better co-ordination. Napoleon gave modern France absolute uniformity, complete co-ordination, but at what cost! Everywhere subordination was substituted for initiative. Responsibility disappeared: the local functionary was independent of the men he governed, and the central power was too vast a Leviathan to be seriously weakened by the unpopularity of a few subordinate agents. When the parish pump is loose, the matter is referred, "through channels," as they say in the American Army, to a Cabinet Minister in Paris; and the reply—which is generally a request for further reports—descends slowly from that majestic personage to Prefect, Subprefect, and Mayor. A bureaucracy of one million men was thus created, honest on the whole, fairly competent, but essentially mediocre, routine-loving, cumbrous, enmeshed in the myriad coils of its own red tape.

If the evils of Napoleonic centralization are so obvious, why, then, has France put up with them for a hundred and twenty years? For the same reason that we, practical and progressive Anglo-Saxons, are putting up with our antiquated system of weights and measures; for the same reason that Paris, enlightened, radical Paris, endures the little Chinese wall of its *octroi*—simply through the

force of inertia. It takes an enormous effort to change an old custom. The French are a very conservative people, in spite of their one big Revolution. For thirty years they had been discussing the advisabliity of changing the red of their soldiers' uniform to a less murderous colour: and they went to war in 1914 with red trousers and képis. But in 1789 France was at one of those rare moments when a country is plastic. The old regime was almost forgotten, the new had not had time to solidify. Had Napoleon been a Liberal instead of a martinet, from what an incubus would the nineteenth century have been preserved! But, then, he would not have been Napoleon.

There is another reason for the indefinite survival of the Napoleonic bureaucracy. The system is extremely flattering, as well as convenient, for the Central Government. No one likes to curtail his own influence. The different parties contend for political supremacy in Paris: they do not want to lessen the supremacy which is theirs to-day, or may be theirs to-morrow. We must add that, from 1789 to 1870, no regime outlived a single generation of electors: the maximum duration was eighteen years, the average ten. Thus insecure, encamped precariously in the Napoleonic fortress, each Government was particularly averse to any reform which might weaken its strategic position. The Second Empire alone enjoyed, for a few years at least, genuine and almost unanimous popular support: but the Second Empire, through its very origin, was committed to the preservation of the Napoleonic system.

Now that the Third Republic has reached the mature age of fifty, and has issued triumphant from the ordeal of war, it could at last afford to effect a genuine decentralization. Not a decentralization imposed from above, which would be certain to remain a dead letter, but the removal of all artificial obstacles to the growth of local activities. Signs are not lacking that, in spite of the reluctance of politicians, such an evolution is under way. The provincial universities are an instance of successful regionalism,

and a few great cities, such as Lyons and Bordeaux, are creating for themselves zones of influence which may find later their economic and even their political organization. Diversity, initiative, self-reliance, are reviving, and the baleful traces of Napoleonism may be effaced at last.¹

IV

But there remains the impregnable rock, the Code! The Code, that Napoleon prized more highly than the most brilliant of his victories; the Code, which survived on the Rhine for eighty-five years after the downfall of French domination; the Code, whose influence is to be traced in Poland, in Italy, even in Louisiana and in Japan!

Let us look at the Code, then, with smoked glasses if you please, lest we be struck blind by its splendour.

The reorganization of France by the Constituent Assembly necessitated a recasting of French law. Not only had new principles been introduced, and old practices condemned—such as the survivals of feudalism—but, as the provinces were obliterated, their traditional legal systems were bound to disappear also. For a few years the situation was chaotic enough, as it needs must be in the course, and even in the wake, of a Revolution. The new laws did not yet fully cover the ground; of the old ones there remained only isolated fragments; and, to make matters worse, a judicial system which still had to depend partly upon jurisprudence was administered by elected judges.

The Revolution therefore felt keenly the need of a Code. It was one of the promises solemnly made to the

¹ There are at present, within the framework of the Napoleonic prefectorial system, two such *regions*: Algeria, although considered as a mere extension of European France, under the Ministry of the Interior, and divided into three ordinary French departments, has a Governor-General, a special budget, and the embryo of a Parliament. The three departments of Alsace-Lorraine, under a *Commissaire Général*, form a group which has not yet been fully assimilated to the rest of the country. We may hope that it is not Alsace-Lorraine that will disappear, but Brittany, Burgundy, Provence, that will revive.

nation in 1791. Cambacérès presented two successive projects under the Convention, and a third one under the Directoire. Another project was submitted by Jacqueminot.

Ten years had gone by, and still no code ! But the situation had not grown from bad to worse. On the contrary, from year to year, new legislation was filling in the gaps, and old customs were falling into disuse. We must not imagine, therefore, that, before the Consulate, France was in a state of utter lawlessness, from which she was saved by the genius of Bonaparte. If the Code had not been promulgated in 1804, France would not have been worse off than she was in 1803. Great countries like England have lived for long and peaceful generations without a code.

In popular opinion a Code of the French type presents an overwhelming advantage over a traditional legal system like that of Great Britain : the advantage of simplicity and brevity. I have at hand a pocket edition of the Civil Code : it fills only eight hundred pages, and, neatly bound, cost only four francs and fifty centimes in ante-bellum days. But this advantage is a delusion of the lay mind. I find advertised on the fly-leaf of my little Code a *Practical Treatise of Civil Law* in twenty-nine big volumes ; a *Repertory of French Law* in thirty-seven, with a supplement in six more ; and the Digest of Jurisprudence grows at an alarming rate. Unfortunately, the law cannot be made so brief and so plain as to be "understood of the people" : lawyers will take care of that ! New legislation and the interpretation of judges will soon overgrow any Code. So the quality of brevity is of doubtful value after all. The problem is not : How short is your Code ? but : How good ?

The Civil Code was good, on the whole and at the time, because it was a workable compromise. In spite of a misconception deeply rooted in English-speaking countries, it is not based entirely upon Roman law. Roman law had never prevailed in Northern France, the dominant section of the country. The Code is eminently eclectic.

It englobes Roman principles, the ordinances of the King, much of the revolutionary legislation, and even distinct survivals of local customs. But this eclectic character, which made it effective as a provisional solution, destroyed its value as a piece of juridical philosophy. It is on a level, intellectually and morally, with the metaphysics of Victor Cousin and the literature of Casimir Delavigne. Like them, it is the embodiment of bourgeois common sense, without originality and without generosity. For that reason it has been bitterly assailed by great jurists. Savigny, the founder of the historical school in the study of law, had nothing but scorn for its shallowness. John Austin had this to say : “ It contains no definitions of technical terms (even the most leading), no exposition of the *rationale* of distinctions (even the most leading), no exposition of the broad principles and rules to which the narrower provisions expressed in the Code are subordinated : hence its fallacious brevity.”

The Code offers, therefore, the same fault as all the Institutions of the Consulate. Bonaparte was always haunted with the idea of immediate, material order : he was, in all things, the supreme Policeman. Now the Police is to be respected as a necessary evil, but it cannot be expected to foster progress. The policeman’s mind will never understand that, in the apparent chaos of liberty, a richer, more lasting, organic order may be evolved. Napoleon wanted laws to “ fall in ” at once, and stand in line. The result was striking, no doubt, and still impresses posterity. But neither French nor foreign jurists believe that it was as beneficial as it was impressive.

For the diligence with which the work was carried out, Napoleon’s devouring energy receives most of the credit. Conversely, it might be said that he is responsible for the haste with which the Code was put together. He is not responsible for much else. He acted as Chairman, in ninety-seven out of one hundred and two meetings of the general sessions of the Council of State in which the Code was discussed ; he kept his officials working all

night if necessary, and his interventions were frequently practical in spirit, and curiously picturesque in style. Still, it is evident that the actual task was performed by technicians, particularly by the Committee, of which Portalis, Tronchet, Bigot de Préameneu, and Maleville were the members. J. P. Esmein, professor in the Paris Law School, member of the French Institute, shows no sign of anti-Napoleonic bias when he pronounces calmly, as a fact established beyond doubt, that "interesting as his observations occasionally are he cannot be considered as a serious collaborator to this great work." Of all the "legends" which form a halo round the Consulate and the Empire, there is none more "legendary" than that of Napoleon descending alone, like Moses from Mount Sinai, with the tables of the law in his hands.

Yet it might be claimed that in such a legend, as in many legends, there is an element of symbolical truth deeper than strict accuracy. The Code may be mediocre, and Napoleon's share in it may be small, but essentially the Code and the whole of Napoleon's government stood for the same thing, *civic equality*. The Code thus embodies the fundamental principle of the Revolution, and Napoleon cannot be separated from the Code, of which he was, if not the author, at least the propagandist and the guardian.

But the principles of civic equality, as the basis of French law, had been formulated in the Declaration of the Rights of Man as early as 1791. It had been hailed with delight, for it satisfied a profound and age-long yearning. Throughout the misery and terror of the great cataclysm, that one point was never lost sight of. It was inconceivable that any Code could be passed which did not accept the Declaration as its foundation.

What strikes us therefore in the Civil Code is not the principle of civic equality, which had become a truism: it is that the legislators departed so widely from it. Had not the Code been forced down, *in toto*, by a strong Government, it could never have been so reactionary. For Equality, supposed to be, much more than Liberty,

the tribal goddess of the French, was sacrificed at many points.

There was no equality between the sexes. Woman remained eternally a minor. Her private property, her earnings, were at the disposal of her husband. She could not even appear on the witness-stand without his authorization. The "double standard" of sexual morality was rigidly enforced: in cases of adultery the erring wife was sentenced to imprisonment for no less than three months, nor more than two years (Art. 308): the erring husband went free. A woman had no redress against her seducer, for (Art. 340) "*la recherche de la paternité est interdite.*" Surely this was the Code of the Rights of Man and the Wrongs of Woman!

There was no equality either between the classes. The bourgeoisie, triumphant, had abolished the privileges of the nobility and the clergy: but they had strengthened their own. Witness that famous Article 1781, which did not disappear until 1868: "The master's affirmation is to be accepted: with reference to the rate of wages, to the payment of the previous year's salary, and to payments made on account of the wages for the current year."¹

But if the Code was reactionary from the first, Napoleon himself was much more reactionary still, and the sacred principle of civic equality was sorely mangled in his imperious hands. For a start, he restored slavery in the French colonies, by decree dated May 19, 1802: negroes, like women and wage-earners, did not come within Napoleon's conception of civic equality. This little piece of strong-handed policy cost Napoleon a brother-in-law, Leclerc, whom he does not seem to have regretted overmuch; but also a whole army, and ultimately the possession of Hayti. A grim commentary

¹ *Le maître est cru sur son affirmation: pour la quotité des gages; pour le paiement du salaire de l'année échue; et pour les acomptes donnés pour l'année courante.* Articles 414, 415, 416 of the Penal Code, 1810, made any "coalition" or combination of the workmen punishable; combinations of employers, on the contrary, were allowed, unless "unjust and abusive"—a large loophole, in view of the fact that the judges belonged to the same class as the employers.

upon the words of a revolutionist : " Perish the colonies rather than a principle ! "

Every step in Napoleon's career was marked by an infraction against civic equality. In 1806 he established *Majorats*, or indivisible estates transmitted by right of primo-geniture. His plan was to foster the growth of a new hereditary aristocracy, whose origin and interests would be bound up with those of his own regime. It may be argued that in this case Napoleon was right ; but the new creation was plainly contrary to the spirit and to the letter of the Code. In 1808 Napoleon went further and set up a new nobility. This nobility was, or was supposed to be, accessible to all men of conspicuous merit, and there was something thoroughly democratic in the fact that a former sergeant and a former laundress could become Duke and Duchess of Danzig. Still, most of the Napoleonic titles were hereditary—an evident infringement on the principles proclaimed by the American and the French Revolutions. If we should entertain any delusion about the " democratic " character of Napoleon's nobiliary scheme, we have only to remember that he also showed increasing favour to those members of the ancient aristocracy who rallied round his throne. He liked to fill his parvenu court with genuine titles, as though he himself did not find his own creations sufficiently convincing. He despised in his heart the nobles with whom he surrounded himself : " Only such people make good servants," he said, with the thorough contempt for human nature that was the keynote of his rule. The Court of the Tuileries and Compiègne was fast becoming as punctilious and as exclusive as that of Vienna.

We might quote many other instances of this Napoleonic trend towards the restoration of privilege, this persistent, insidious whittling away of the principles of 1789. The Revolution had freely opened all professions to all qualified men, but Bonaparte, in spite of the oft-quoted motto, " *La carrière ouverte aux talents*," reorganized many of them into monopolistic " orders " ; thus the legal and financial professions, barristers, attorneys,

notaries, bailiffs, stockbrokers, auctioneers, were made the preserves of the bourgeoisie. Perhaps the most flagrant example of a class privilege established by Napoleon is the practice of allowing the rich to buy themselves off from military service. The old nobility had always claimed the right to be first in battle; the new ruling class used all its influence to secure exemption from fighting. The blood tax fell with all its weight upon the poor. Napoleon, it is true, needed so much cannon fodder that the bourgeoisie itself was no longer safe, at least after Wagram; men had to buy themselves off repeatedly, and then were drafted after all. But the undemocratic principle of paid substitution survived until 1872.¹

We have seen what Napoleon did with Equality—the doctrine which, it is alleged, is found at the core of the Revolution, of the Civil Code, and of his reign. We need hardly ask what he did with Liberty. His apologists are little concerned with that: they claim that the French did not understand liberty, and never missed it. Liberty is so completely the antithesis of the military mind that Napoleon could not be expected to show any great tenderness for it. We all know by what efficient means discordant voices were hushed, in politics, in literature, and in society. France was without a genuine Parliament, without public meetings, without a free Press. Sermons, drawing-room tattle, and private correspondence were under strict censorship. Silence reigned, interrupted only by a well-drilled chorus of praise, until the colossus tottered. Then the Legislative Body recovered the use of its voice, and raised it with a sharpness which, so belated, was another form of cowardice. By 1814 the Napoleonic regime had completely overtaken that of the Louis in the way of despotism. “*Lettres de Cachet*” had their modern equivalents, and for one Bastille that the people had stormed in its wrath, Napoleon restored eight—Saumur, Ham, If, Lanskwrow, Pierre-Chatel,

¹ The bourgeoisie preserved an attenuated privilege in this respect until 1889.

Fenestrelle, Campiano, Vincennes. "My father hath chastised you with whips: but I shall chastise you with scorpions."

V

The most enduring of Napoleon's creations, more lasting than the Civil Code, will probably be the Legion of Honour. It is a very ungrateful task to discuss that glorious institution. Its administration has been, from the first, markedly successful, and free from gross scandals. Its personnel is unquestionably an *élite*, and there is no rival order in the world to-day that enjoys as universal a prestige whilst being so widely distributed.

But here, again, we detect the hand of the man who played so skilfully upon the lower elements in human nature. Even heroism, genius, virtue, are connected by some of their roots with selfishness, and therefore with vulgarity. It is these very roots that Napoleon, with unfailing instinct, managed to isolate and to use for purposes of his own. It is the cheap ingredients found in the highest merit that gave him his opportunity. To spurn the appreciation of one's fellowmen would be churlish pride, but to strive for a material, official token of this appreciation is childish vanity; and it was to vanity, not to conscience, that Bonaparte addressed his appeal.

We used to think that vanity was pre-eminently a French weakness: prolonged sojourns in England and in America have cured us of that delusion. The great Western democracy may laugh at coronets and ribbons. But where is the American girl who would not be flattered by the offer of a title, or the American statesman, soldier, or scholar, who would turn down Napoleon's "star of the brave"? Who would not rather be a plain knight in the Legion than High and Mighty Potentate of some "Mystic Shrine"? The rank growth of courtesy titles—Honourable, Doctor, Judge, Colonel—proves that Vanity hath her seat West of the Atlantic and North of the Channel as well as in Tarascon. But does not this

justify Napoleon's course? He knew man, that he is neither an angel nor a beast: why not turn man's irremediable weaknesses to good advantage? Why not, indeed? It is the philosophy that the French Government applies, when, instead of putting down the gambling evil, it rakes off its share through the *Pari Mutuel*. We are not claiming that Napoleon was not a shrewd ruler. But shrewdness in flattering the foibles of men is not itself a heroic virtue. The seamy blue coat of Lazare Hoche impresses us more than the diamond star on Napoleon's breast.

VI

In the domain of public education the Revolution had formulated magnificent principles, proposed elaborate plans, which, after one hundred and thirty years, France has not yet completely carried out, and which it was long the fashion to dismiss as Utopian. But it had also attempted much in a practical way, and its achievements were not inconsiderable. The Central Schools, giving secondary education, offered a remarkably intelligent course. If a predominant place was given to pure and applied sciences, philosophy, history, legislation, and "comparative grammar" were also included: it was a training singularly well adapted to a scientific and democratic age. Above the Central Schools, the Convention had created in Paris a Normal School, with a Faculty whose names are remembered to this day: Lagrange, Laplace, Monge, Haüy, Daubenton, Berthollet, Volney, Garat, Laharpe, Bernardin de St. Pierre. A score of other creations or radical re-organizations—the Polytechnic School, the Museum of Natural History, the Conservatoire of Arts and Crafts, the College of France—fostered scientific investigation and scholarship. Much had still to be done; elementary education was still very sketchy; the gap between the Central Schools and the great technical schools remained to be filled. But the road had been splendidly traced and the impulse given.

Napoleon tried his hand at the educational problem, and the result was the Imperial University (1808). It was another of those simple, majestic conceptions in which the military mind of the Emperor revealed its love for symmetry and passive discipline. The University was a corporation, almost an "Order," entrusted with a monopoly of teaching. Ecclesiastical and private establishments were to take their place therein. Strict unity of doctrine would thus be obtained. Not only "on such a date and at such an hour would the same Latin text be translated in all schools," but a whole generation would be brought up, invincibly attached to the Catholic Church and the Imperial Dynasty. It was a grandiose scheme, but it failed, in Napoleon's own time.

It failed because, in spite of enormous concessions to Catholicism, it did not recognize the right of the Church to control the whole of public education. Now, the Church cannot accept any monopoly except her own; in her eyes learning and religion cannot be divorced. If she cannot be dominant, she must at least be free. She cannot wholeheartedly become part of a lay organization. So for nearly half a century the Church fought, insidiously or openly, against the monopoly of the State University, until the Falloux Law, in 1850, restored the liberty of education, and marked the end of the Napoleonic system. The name survived, with innumerable traces of the old despotism. But the fundamental idea was dead. It is doubtful whether it had ever lived.

Doomed to failure as a general conception, the University of Napoleon was not successful in its details. Danton had said: "Next to bread, education is the first need of the people." Lakanal, the Lazare Carnot of public education, the organizer of the Central Schools, the Normal School, the Museum, had for his motto: "An ignorant people cannot be free." Napoleon seems to have acted on the reverse principle: "A docile people must remain ignorant." The share of elementary education in the Imperial Budget was 4,250 francs, granted

to the novitiate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. England was not much in advance of France in this respect. But in France a definite start had been made, and Napoleon is responsible for stopping it.

The *Lycées* and *Collèges* which took the place of the Central Schools were patterned after Napoleon's cherished barracks. The students wore a military uniform and moved to the rolling of drums. Even to-day there are in the life of the French *Lycée* unlovely traces of that regime. The curriculum was made more rigid, more formal, more narrowly classical. Modern history, the study of legislation, philosophy, were ruled out or emasculated.¹ The task of education was now to train subjects and soldiers, not citizens.

Superior education was represented by the *Facultés* of Theology, Law, Medicine, Sciences and Letters. These *Facultés* (Schools) were not organized into Universities, but preserved a separate existence, frequently in separate cities. The schools of Medicine and Law, having definite needs to supply, had an honourable but undistinguished career. The schools of Sciences and Letters had but an unsubstantial life. They had no staff of their own: it was, as a rule, teachers in the high schools who also gave a few general lectures, without organized research, without laboratories, without any test of success except the attendance of a “society” public. If France had been reduced to these Napoleonic *Facultés*, she would have died of intellectual anæmia. Men like Duruy finally realized that the country had no system of higher education to compare with that of Germany: the creation of the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*, in 1867, was the first step in a long effort, crowned in 1896 by the restoration of the local Universities. If French science remained splendidly active in the nineteenth century, it was through the special establishments of higher learning created or modernized by the Revolution: the Normal School, the

¹ In the same spirit, the Section of Moral and Political Sciences was eliminated from the Institute of France: Napoleon could not bear what he called *ideology*, and what we call thought.

Museum, the Polytechnic School, the College of France.¹ Napoleon's hand can be felt in French education only as a clog.

VII

The end of religious strife is invariably quoted as one of the miracles performed by the First Consul. Before him, nothing but persecution, vandalism, sacrilege: a determined effort to dechristianize the land of the crusaders, a drunken mob invading the Convention attired in ecclesiastical vestments, a ballet dancer posing as Goddess Reason on the altar of Notre Dame, the arch-terrorist, Robespierre, acting as Pontiff of the "Supreme Being." At a touch of the Napoleonic wand the churches are re-opened, the priests are respected, order and decency are restored, and France enjoys a century of peace.

Here, again, the facts do not quite tally with this once popular theory.

Religious reform, it is true, was the rock upon which the hopes of a peaceful, orderly revolution were shattered. The religious policy of the Constituent Assembly, and even of the Convention, may not have been so preposterous as we have long been told, but it cannot be denied that it ended in bankruptcy. Persecution is a confession of failure, and the ecclesiastical creations of the period, even when they were not grotesque or hateful, remained exceedingly weak.

However, the Convention, through sheer lassitude, had learnt its lesson as early as September 1794: it then gave up the idea of supporting an official Church against the wish of the people. In February 1795 the next step in the complete separation of Church and State was taken: all forms of public worship were declared free. In May a large number of churches were restored to their original use: in Paris alone no less than twelve. Pacifica-

¹ The reader who is unfamiliar with French education is warned that these names convey a very different meaning in French and in English—but this is not the place to dwell upon these differences.

tion could hardly be expected to proceed unchecked under the Directoire, whose course was violently jerked by contradictory *coups d'état*. That Government, feeble and obstinate, insisted upon maintaining an official “Tenth Day Worship” (*Culte Décadaire*), and, at one time, persecuted a number of individual priests, friends and foes of the Constitution alike. But the great current of national “normalcy” was carrying with it even the distracted Directoire, and tolerance was making incessant progress. People were allowed to keep the traditional Sunday, although officials still had to respect the *Decadi*; and by the end of 1799 nearly forty thousand churches had been turned over to the faithful.

No doubt there were still a few steps to be taken. The last annoying restrictions would soon have disappeared: the compulsory sharing of the same edifices by various sects was undesirable; the moribund *Decadi* would have given up its ghostly existence as soon as its connection with the Government was severed. But the situation was indeed full of promise, and we cannot look back upon it without regret. Imagine, as early as 1800, a Roman Catholic Church free within a free country; by its side a Gallican Church, heir of the Constitutional Church, whose discipline and whose clergy were by no means to be despised. That French Church would in all likelihood have remained a minor element in French life; but it might have offered a refuge for those Catholics who were driven away from Rome, and yet were unwilling to rush into Calvinism. Then, there was a sect of Theophilanthropists, somewhat akin to our Unitarians, small in number, but with distinguished names on its rolls—Andrieux, Daunou, Chénier, Dupont de Nemours. It offered what France is lacking to-day: a spiritual home for the religious-minded free-thinker. It was not to be expected that ten stormy years could have brought out in France the same luxuriance and variety of religious life as in England and America; but the seed of freedom was already fructifying. Then the Little Corporal came.

We must repeat that to Napoleon there was no order

conceivable, except uniformity and rigid discipline. He needed the Church as a spiritual police: he would later speak of "his bishops and his gendarmes," and he had loyalty to himself included in the Catechism. Rome was willing to come to terms with him: his conception of authority was not very different from hers, he was victorious, and his hand was full of gifts. So the unholy reunion of Church and State was consummated: the Constitutional Church was merged again in Roman Catholicism, Theophilanthropy was suppressed, and "order reigned."

There is no reason to believe that religious liberty, so successful elsewhere, was premature in France in 1801. But we do not need to consider hypotheses in order to appraise Napoleon's regime. "By their fruit shall ye know them": the Concordat stands condemned. It was an ambiguous document, made more contradictory still by the "Organic Articles" surreptitiously tagged on to it.¹ Dictated by immediate expediency, without any serious knowledge of the historical aspects of the problem, without any generous principle to throw light into the future, it did not settle any of the outstanding questions between Church and State. From the days of Napoleon to those of Premier Combes, it remained uncertain whether the civil authorities had the right to *appoint* bishops (whom the Pope would later confirm), or only to *nominate* them. It remained uncertain whether the confiscation of ecclesiastical property had finally been accepted by the Pope, so that, for a hundred years, the exact nature of the budget of public worship remained in dispute. For some, it represented merely salaries for services performed, and could be suppressed when these services were no longer required; for others, it was an annuity in payment of a debt incurred by the State in 1790, and could not be repudiated without flagrant injustice. Gallicanism, the tradition of autonomy always

¹ Whilst the Concordat was in the form of a treaty between the Pope and the French Government, the so-called Organic Articles were framed by the secular Power alone, and were never recognized as valid by the Church.

cherished by the French clergy, was made official in the Organic Articles, but it was always combated by Rome. Finally, one of the most perplexing difficulties was totally ignored: the status of the regular Orders.

So the Concordat, with the curse of haste, ignorance, and selfishness resting on its inception, could bring no genuine peace. Throughout the nineteenth century Church and State were not so much united as interlocked in constant wrangling. The Church paid heavily for her quasi-monopoly; her connection with the State sapped her vitality. Religion was the chief sufferer. The Liberals, finding no free Church to welcome them, went over, with Lamennais, Michelet, Hugo, into anti-clerical free-thought. It is difficult to discover what the State gained thereby: certainly not tranquillity nor prestige. And yet Church and State were averse to a regime of liberty: both were afraid that it would mark the beginning of a life-and-death struggle. They were resigned to a life of constant bickerings within the Concordat. They did not realize that, instead of a protection against religious war, that treaty was the chief cause of their dissensions. The record of modern France in ecclesiastical affairs is not an enviable one: it was the insincere settlement of 1801 casting its long shadow of distrust.

It has been said of Napoleon's political and administrative institutions: "The instrument that he made he alone could wield: it was too heavy for less powerful hands." Curiously enough, the Concordat was a worse failure in the hands of its creator than in those of his successors. When we hear his wonderful work praised in restoring friendly co-operation between Church and State, we must remember that within ten years the Emperor was excommunicated and the Pope a prisoner, and that Napoleon himself confessed: "The Concordat was my worst mistake." Perhaps Napoleon-worshippers will finally accept his own testimony.

Once more, we are not attempting to tell "the whole truth," but only the other side of the truth. We are far from pretending that the rule of Napoleon was

unsuccessful and evil in every respect. What we are claiming is this: France was still in a state of chaos in 1799—a welter of ruined traditions, baffled idealism, lawless appetites. But out of that chaos, weariness, and experience were creating order. Napoleon did but accelerate this restoration of normal life. Even under a Barras, it would have taken place, and he does not deserve the exclusive credit that he receives for it. But this very acceleration, sensational no doubt, was a curse in disguise. For Napoleon obtained it by a systematic sacrifice of liberty in all fields. The worst tendencies of the Ancient Regime and of the Revolution towards absolutism were renewed and strengthened: France had a military Robespierre on the throne of Louis XIV. The germs of genuine democracy were, on the contrary, stifled. Free government, local autonomy, independent Churches, all disappeared. The progress of material prosperity may have been hastened by a few years; but the soul of France was shackled for a century.

Chapter III

"FIRST IN THE HEARTS OF HIS COUNTRYMEN"

THERE IS A THIRD ASPECT of the Legend: after Napoleon the God of War, and Napoleon the Lawgiver, we have Napoleon the idol of his people. What was the use of elections? His immense popularity was a daily plebiscite. After fifteen years of rule, conquered, banished, deprived of all material power, he had but to escape, set foot on French soil, and France was his again. A whole generation later, his mere name, borne by an insignificant princeling, was sufficient to defeat Cavaignac, Lamartine, Ledru-Rollin, and Raspail. And if he should return to-day, even Mr. Hendrik Van Loon confesses that he, like the rest, might follow and cheer the Emperor.

This fascination of Napoleon is one of the most striking facts in history and one of the best established. Not to disprove it, but to analyse it, is the purpose of this book. And the special task of this chapter will be to assign a date to it. To what extent was Napoleon genuinely popular in his own lifetime?

I

In 1796-1797 the people were turning their eyes towards the army with greater affection and hope than ever before. They were sick of the Terrorists, and sick of the profiteers. The army was hard-working, poorly paid, truly national in spirit, and magnificently successful. The contrast was so flagrant between its glorious deeds and the corrupt inefficiency of the Directoire, that any victorious general could easily have become an idol. The early prestige

of Napoleon, therefore, was not purely personal: it was the prestige of the whole army crystallizing round his name, just as a supersaturated solution will crystallize round any object that is plunged into it. We remember the days when, out of wounded patriotism, out of disgust for parliamentary scandals, France was ready to acclaim any "saviour." She made a hero of Boulanger, a mediocre middle-aged adventurer, without a victory to his credit, simply because he had a uniform, a blond beard, and a black horse. We do not mean that Bonaparte was a mere Boulanger: but the trust that the French reposed in him was not so much inspired by him as pre-existent, accumulating, eager to spend itself. It would have spent itself upon Hoche as freely as upon Bonaparte; but Hoche conveniently died, and Napoleon stepped forward.

This unrivalled opportunity was seized by the right man: the right man because of his talents, no doubt, but chiefly because of his unlimited ambition and of his complete freedom from principles and scruples. He saw his chance, and systematically cultivated his popularity. No doubt he waged war with surpassing mastery in his Italian campaign. But he was not thinking first of the French Republic, or even of victory in itself. He was thinking of the French public, and of Napoleon's place in their minds. After the first successes, it was indeed a political, an electoral campaign. Proclamation, booty in gold or art treasures, treaties—everything had the definite purpose of paving his way to power. When he started for Egypt, he left press agents behind. "Qu'on ne parle que de moi!"—I want my name to be the sole topic of conversation—he instructed Josephine. Josephine and her friends were successful: Napoleon lost the war on the Nile, but won it in Paris. Incidentally, Josephine had *her* name talked about also during those months of grass widowhood, in a manner which was far from pleasing to the returning hero. We shall have to dwell later, and repeatedly, on Napoleon as a master of advertising; it is perhaps in that domain,

even more than in war, that his genius stands without a peer.

However, in spite of his successes, in spite of his advertising, it is doubtful whether his sole popularity would have carried him to his goal, had he not been picked out, led by the hand, almost urged forward, by a small group within the Government itself. He might have said of the Republic what one of his generals said of Malta: “It was a good thing there was some one inside to hand us the key.” The Directoire had reached the paradoxical situation of a Government eager to commit suicide, plotting against itself, casting about for its own executioner. It had lived by *coups d'état*: and by a *coup d'état* of its own contriving it was fated to die. The group which was preparing the change had thought of Augereau, of Joubert, even of Hédouville; they needed a sword, and they would have preferred one with not too much of a man at the hilt. But Bonaparte was back, and a *coup* without his complicity would be a risky affair. So he was invited to join the party. He did not have to start a plot: the plot was waiting for him, with his own part written out in detail.

Everybody is familiar with the comedy that was to be staged. The curious thing is that the actor cast for the title rôle had an unaccountable fit of stage fright at the critical moment. Bonaparte at Saint-Cloud lost his nerve, spoke incoherent words, gave those who were not “in the know” a chance to recover. Already they were raising the terrible cry: “*Hors la loi!*” which had daunted Robespierre. The smooth scheme of Siéyès was compromised.

It was Lucien Bonaparte who saved the situation. Checked in the assembly, over which he presided, he went out, appealed to the Grenadiers, and had the hall cleared *manu militari*. This unforeseen and brutal turn, due to Napoleon's momentary collapse, served him miraculously well. Had everything gone according to plan, in pseudo-constitutional fashion, Siéyès, the soul of the enterprise, would have been able to treat on a

footing of equality with Bonaparte. The parliamentary *coup d'état* miscarried; the soldiers won the day; and militarism was in the saddle.

It was therefore neither sheer popularity nor commanding genius that made the 18th of Brumaire possible. The *coup d'état* was conditioned by innumerable circumstances. The chief of these were the disrepute into which the Directoire had fallen; the prestige of the army as a whole; the intrigues of Siéyès and Barras; Napoleon's own merit; his cleverly engineered boom; and, last but not least, sheer luck. There were all these, and many other rays, in the light of his ascending "star."

II

For a couple of years it seems that the First Consul was genuinely popular—except, of course, with a small number of "ideologists" and irreconcilable Jacobins, to whom short shrift was given. Bonaparte was working for peace, and did secure peace, at Lunéville and at Amiens. His civilian accomplices in the Brumaire *coup d'état* had picked out for him a political and administrative personnel which was to remain the backbone of the Empire, and which did not lack efficiency. Order was gradually restored; an impulse was given to economic activities, and the funds were rising. If the institutions of the Consulate were to prove cumbrous and illiberal, these faults had not had time to reveal themselves. The Tribunat had not yet been silenced. The Code was still in the making. The Concordat had brought apparent peace. It was the honeymoon of France and her new master.

But there were disquieting symptoms: the soldier could not long tolerate any signs of liberty. The discussions of the Tribunat, academic though they were, exasperated Napoleon. "There are (in that assembly) a dozen or fifteen metaphysicians that ought to be drowned. It is a vermin I have on my clothes." And when Volney, an old acquaintance, a member of the Senate, dared to speak in favour of complete religious

liberty, the answer was a kick of such violence that he had to be carried away. From the time when Napoleon became Consul for life to his downfall in 1814, we must read the official annals of his reign with the utmost caution. It is evident that no popularity can safely be called genuine under a repressive regime. Its manifestations are vitiated in their very source. Every precaution that the ruler takes against public opinion is a proof of mutual diffidence. After 1802 criticism was silenced, and flattery became an organized administrative service. All the praises in honour of Napoleon the Great were but the echoes of his own voice.

We have already indicated how completely liberty had been suppressed. The impressive machinery of the Consular and Imperial Assemblies was really working in a vacuum. There was but one significant word in the Constitution: Napoleon. All others had to be interpreted in a strictly Pickwickian sense. For instance, Article 64 of the Constitution of the year XII (1804) provided for a Senatorial committee of seven to safeguard the “liberty of the Press.” But periodicals were excepted from its jurisdiction. All but thirteen papers had been suppressed by the First Consul. The survivors existed only on sufferance: at the first hint of hostility—and faint praise would at once be interpreted as a declaration of war—they could be sent to join the silent majority. In 1805, in 1810, the system became still more repressive. By 1811, not only had every shadow of liberty in the expression of thought been swept away, but there was little trace even of private rights of ownership and control in the newspapers. Napoleon came to consider a periodical as a mere *instrumentum regni*: the private manager to whom it was “conceded” remained as dependent upon the Government as a prefect. The Emperor could fill the paper with official news: he could impose some functionary, or some personal favourite, as “director.” The Press in all countries under French influence was subjected to the same regime, and only in England could the truth be told.

In spite of the letter of the law, the book Press was not freer than the periodicals. Printers were constituted into a privileged corporation, they could not do business without a licence, and that licence could be revoked at will by the Government. There is nothing in the annals of the Ancient Regime more high-handed than the judicial murder of the German bookseller Palm, or the confiscation of Madame de Staël's book *On Germany*. An edition of ten thousand copies was seized and destroyed, after an imperial censor had given the work his imprimatur. It is in the light of such facts that the popularity of Napoleon must be tested.

In this dead silence, as of an army on parade, only official praises were heard ; but, with all their fulsome-ness, they sounded pitifully weak. We shall see that not a single writer of the first rank, or even of the second, rallied permanently to Napoleon. He had to be satisfied with the dithyrambs of Fontanes, the Grand Master of his University, an elegant sceptic ; or with those of Brifaut, who, having acquired the habit of servility, lauded Louis XVIII in the same strain as he had sung the birth of the King of Rome. In this field also the Emperor had no worthy lieutenants : he alone could win victories. He was his own advertising agent, and the world has never seen his peer.

War itself was part of his scheme. Noticing a cooling off in the applause that greeted him at the Opera, he turned towards his staff officers and said : " Gentlemen, in three weeks we shall start a new campaign." The story is not well authenticated, and we quote it as a symbol rather than a fact ; but surely Napoleon knew that the rolling of drums is a certain cure for independent thinking, and that martial music will inevitably elicit cheers. Court functions, reviews, triumphal entries, made the short intervals of peace almost as impressive as war itself. And constantly, amid the vast silence of forty million men, the same full, commanding voice was heard, in speeches, proclamations, bulletins—all directed towards a single end, the glorification of the Emperor.

The architecture of Napoleon's time bore the same stamp: it was advertising on a colossal scale. In fifteen years he did not complete in Paris a single building of permanent use or of disinterested beauty. He called for plans to complete the Louvre, which—fortunately—were not carried out; and he dreamed of a grandiose palace for the King of Rome, but it came to nothing. What he did undertake with a will was a series of triumphal monuments: the Temple of Glory (now the Madeleine Church), two arches, two columns. Now, what are such buildings but permanent bill-boards of bronze and stone, insistently calling to the people and to posterity: "Napoleon, the greatest hero in history"? It was sound psychology: Napoleon's monuments were a splendid investment. Posterity remains impressed by their gigantic bragging. Not only did he get the full benefit of those that he saw completed—the Arc du Carrousel, the Vendôme Column, although both were mediocre pastiches of Roman models: but he receives credit for the Arc de l'Etoile, the masterpiece of its kind, which was completed twenty-five years after his fall, according to new plans, by the unheroic M. Thiers and the bourgeois King, Louis-Philippe. And his fame is enhanced and perpetuated, because he lies under the splendid gilded dome of Mansard at the Hôtel des Invalides. Where there is a shrine, the people believe there must be a god. It takes an effort to realize that granite and marble can be just as mendacious as paper. There is appropriateness, however, in the symbolism of these triumphal monuments: a long spiral of toiling and fighting men, unnoticed, unremembered, serving as a pedestal for the statue of one man alone; or a gateway that opens on empty space, and leads nowhither.

III

We must therefore raise the serene and heroic mask of Imperial France—and we discover on the living face an expression of indifference which deepens into weariness

and despair. Few periods are more intimately known to us than the reign of Napoleon, and the memoirs even of faithful servants confirm the general impression : fear he could inspire, admiration also, increasing as the square of the distance from his person ; but confidence, very little, and love, hardly at all.

After the clear dawn of the Consulate had turned into oppressive splendour, Bonaparte was not the idol of France ; he was not even the idol of the army. Yet he had every claim upon the loyalty of the military. He led them to victory, and soldiers, like college boys or politicians, may be relied upon to cheer a successful captain. There was an artistic quality in his technique which appealed particularly to the French as a nation of connoisseurs. It is the hardest thing in the world to drive French privates to stupid slaughter : the mutinies of 1917 were clear evidence of that fact. But they will cheerfully die if they are made to understand why, or even how. Napoleon took his armies into his confidence : they found intellectual pleasure in his swift, masterly strategy. He cared for their material welfare to the best of his ability. In 1796 he allowed army contractors to rob the Government, but not at the expense of his troops ; when he was sole master he tried to stop civilian profiteering altogether. He saw to it that they were well equipped, and, when on garrison duty, well housed and well fed. He did actually taste their bread and their soup, and was not satisfied with the show of interest which is part of every commander's "business," and causes the men to sneer behind his back. If the commissariat was his weak point when on a campaign, the resourceful French had little to suffer so long as they were fighting in rich and not unfriendly countries, like Italy, Western or Southern Germany. "Napoleon took care of his men as a good workman takes care of his tools."

And he loved them, too, after a fashion, better than he loved anything else, except his own ambition. He never had any home but the army ; he came to feel that he had

no family but the army. He rewarded his men as richly and as brilliantly as he could. He gave them a prestige which hardly any civilian could hope to rival. As the French in those days felt themselves far above the common level of Europe, so did the army feel itself far above the common level of the French. Even to-day Napoleon's Legion of Honour is still fundamentally a military decoration, the Cross of the Brave; and the highest reward to which an administrator, a scientist, a scholar, a poet can aspire is the decoration which comes almost automatically to nearly every captain or major at the end of twenty years' garrison duty. To secure loyalty, Napoleon would even stoop to little tricks which came naturally enough to his histrionic nature: he would, in a grand review, stop abruptly before a private, recognize him, address him by name, and thus turn him into a devoted slave. The facility with which such a scene can be "faked" makes us a trifle suspicious. His officers were fired with the hope of rapid promotion; the constant expansion of the army and the grim selection of the battlefield made every ambition seem reasonable. As for his generals and marshals, he showered upon them dukedoms and principalities; the crowns of Portugal and Poland were even dangled before their eyes; Murat, Eugene, Berthier, were at the same time sovereigns and commanders in his hosts. He allowed them, when it suited his purpose, to plunder a rich territory; Masséna and Soult were not slow in availing themselves of such a chance. So we might expect a whole army of Napoleon-worshippers following blindly "the God of Fortune and of War."

The reality is curiously different. Naturally enough, the foreign contingents were lukewarm or disaffected. Murat said of his Italians: "Dress them in red or dress them in blue, they will run away just the same." The Spaniards dragged into Russia were so reluctant that Napoleon had one in ten shot down in order to encourage the rest. Those other Spaniards whom he had sent to Denmark surrendered to the British as soon as they had

a chance, just as the Prussians of Yorek cheerfully capitulated to the Russians. The Saxons abandoned him at Leipzig. But among the French enthusiasm was hardly less tepid. Conscription was considered as an unmitigated curse. We hear little about this sullen opposition to his militarism, because the Press was not free, and because the classes which alone in those days were capable of self-expression, the bourgeoisie, were long exempted from military service. When Napoleon had to grab the sons of well-to-do and educated families his end was near. The patient peasants of France did not join his hosts with the enthusiasm that so many had displayed in 1792. Neither did they show the sombre and silent determination which they were to evince during the Great War: they were simply goaded into rebellion. Draft evaders formed bands which took refuge in mountain and forest. Against them he had to send veritable military expeditions, which the people called by the significant name of *Infernal Columns*. Transpose such conditions to the years 1914-1918, and you will at once realize what they mean. It was not until 1814 that we see a splendid flare of enthusiasm among his recruits—the “Marie-Louise,” eighteen-year-old, untrained, only half-equipped—because they were defending then, not the Emperor or his Empire, but the sacred soil of their own France.

No doubt there was a nucleus of professional soldiers, veterans of the Old Guard, men who, like Napoleon himself, had no home but their camp: these have gone down to history as his devoted slaves. We are told that tears rolled down their long grey moustaches when he took leave of them at Fontainebleau. They were, emphatically, his “children”; he, their “little Corporal.” Yet it was he who dubbed them the grumblers—“les grognards.” And theirs was not the affectionate, half-humorous grumbling with which such men, both rough and shy, would try to conceal their tenderness. Once more, in France, even an old private is obscurely a disciple of Descartes and Pascal: he wants to understand

why he dies. War, after Tilsit, seemed senseless. And so Napoleon, in the Wagram campaign and after, was hailed with ominous murmurings from the ranks.

As for his generals, most of them abandoned him in 1814 and rallied to Louis XVIII. Ney promised to deliver him to the restored King “in an iron cage”: Murat made a separate peace. Although the “bravest of the brave” and Napoleon’s own brother-in-law both turned round once more, they can hardly be accounted faithful followers of the Emperor. Most of the others had realized three, four, five years before the end that Napoleon was rushing headlong into a catastrophe; and all, sated with honours and pelf, were coolly calculating when it would be most expedient to jump off. General Malet, to whose clever attempt we have already alluded, was justified in saying to his judges: “Who are my accomplices? Had I been successful, all of you would have been my accomplices.” Bonaparte had gambled on the selfish side of human nature, and his creatures showed that he had not misjudged them.

Military glory is the first to pall, even for soldiers. The French were surfeited by years of unexampled triumphs. They had not allowed Napoleon to seize the reins of power in order to win new laurels, but in order to achieve peace. New victories were welcome only in so far as they seemed to bring final peace nearer. When it was realized that they could never achieve that purpose, the French lost all interest. The guns of the Invalides might boom, and the great bells of Notre Dame send forth joyous peals; the Parisians shrugged their shoulders and said: “Only another victory!”—a state of mind which the Germans were to experience in 1917 and early in 1918. The climax was reached in 1814: when the news of the victory of Craonne reached Paris, the Rente fell from 54 to 51, so afraid was France that success might prolong the war.¹

We do not mean to say that the armies of Napoleon

¹ Marshal Foch, “La Bataille de Laon,” *Revue de France*, 1er Mai, 1921, p. 11.

were actively disaffected ; we consider it as certain that, among the millions who served under his eagles, there were thousands upon thousands who were blindly devoted to him. His career seemed, to uncritical eyes, so intimately bound up with the cause of France herself ; there is in the human heart such a craving for hero-worship, that the great leader was bound to be idolized by many. But contemporary documents do not represent that admiration for the Emperor as so universal and so profound as we are apt to believe at present. In 1918 there was in France greater confidence in Foch, and more unanimous affection, than Napoleon ever enjoyed from Eylau to Waterloo.¹

IV

The popularity of Napoleon as the ruler of civilians was even less unanimous and less deep-seated than his prestige as war-lord. Notable men from all classes and parties, regicides as well as émigrés, had rallied to his Government, which bade fair, for a season, to be genuinely national. Once committed to the established order, they did not actively oppose it, because they were weary of revolutions, and because, as a machine, it worked smoothly enough. But between such resignation and genuine loyalty there is an abyss. Siéyès accepted sinecures, and went silently through the Empire as he had gone silently through the Terror : " J'ai vécu ! " Lafayette, best known of the old-world Liberals, Carnot, strongest and most moderate of the former Jacobins, made no effort to be more closely connected with public affairs. Fouché, Talleyrand, worked with Napoleon for years ; but after 1808 they separated secretly their cause from his, persuaded that he was betraying the interests of France as well as his own. Neither in the political

¹ Cf. a recent and extremely interesting document, which we shall use more fully later : Maurice Barrès, " Mon Grand-Père," in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1er Octobre, 1922. There is no touch of romantic hero-worship in Grandfather Barrès, a soldier of the Grand Army. The transfiguration, as Maurice Barrès notes, came much later.

personnel nor in literary circles do we find any strong men giving the Emperor their whole-hearted support. Scribes and valets he had a-plenty, but how many genuine followers?

His family did not have any great faith in him: there is nothing surprising in that, for it takes superhuman achievements to conquer the scepticism of one's own nearest and dearest. The cleverest of the Bonapartes, the true hero of the 18th of Brumaire, Lucien, was in open opposition. Madame Lætitia, his mother, administered with strict economy the handsome allowance that he made her; and when it was hinted to her that such thrift was unbecoming in the mother of an Emperor, she replied: "Yes, he has a good position—if only it would last!" "But four of your sons are kings!" "Who knows but all those kings will come to me for bread?" The question: Will it last? was answered, unhesitatingly, by such men as Joseph de Maistre: It cannot last! And Napoleon read the same answer on the lips, flattering, silent, or bitten with rage, of all men who came near him. Europe took him tragically, but not seriously. There was something ludicrous on an epic scale about that man, who was trying to impress France, Europe, himself, with his achievements, conscious all the while that the ablest of his ministers as well as the keenest of his enemies, Talleyrand, like Metternich, remained incredulous—never doubting but the crazy fabric would soon topple over.¹ Are we not reminded of another War Lord—a caricature, perhaps, but caricatures reveal the essential features better than official portraits—the Emperor who had overwhelmed Rumania, Serbia, Russia; who was offered the crown of Kurland, and a protectorate over the Finland of General Mannerheim; who was picking out an Austrian Archduke for the shadowy vassal kingdom of Poland? It was all very wonderful, but the world, in spite of all evidence, refused to believe. The imperial dreamers awoke, their

¹ Talleyrand is credited with having fixed the day: "You are preparing the bed of the Bourbons, and will not sleep in it ten years"—1804–1814.

splendour gone. But the blood which bespattered their garments was real blood.

It is a sign of Napoleon's genuine greatness that he was never completely fooled by his apparent success. In Grillparzer's play, *Der Traum, ein Leben*, the hero, in his dream, occasionally utters a few words which remind us that the whole thing is a dream. Such moments of semi-lucidity were not rare with Napoleon. But the consciousness that his popularity was artificial and his work fragile only spurred him to more feverish exertions. He had to whip up his imagination and that of the world. He never could take himself so completely for granted that he could afford, like Louis XIV, to remain for a while in majestic repose. He could at least destroy: the last resort of those who crave greatness, and have not been able to build up. "If I fall, I shall bury myself under the ruins of Europe!" was his menace to the Allies. It is the psychology of the Paris Commune: victory, or the torch. But it was an empty boast. Europe survived, weary, diffident, but peaceful.

At the height of his power he expressed in his masterly way the feeling that he could detect through all paid applause or enforced flattery. His courtiers, whether they belonged to the old nobility or to the new, never considered him except as an inevitable but temporary nuisance. Indeed, his Court never was, like that of Louis XIV, a grand drawing-room in which the first of gentlemen entertained other gentlemen: it was a parade ground—or the lion's den. And he read their thought. He fired point-blank that question: "What would people say if I were to die?" And as each courtier was attempting to frame a historic answer, he himself replied: "They would say, '*Ouf!*'"—a sigh of intense relief.

Soldiers, from grognard to marshal, weary with incessant war; merchants ruined by the continental blockade; intellectuals oppressed by his multifarious tyranny; peasants in open rebellion against conscription; Catholics whose Pontiff was imprisoned—all classes had long ceased

to have any confidence in Napoleon. And when he tottered, the *Ouf!* he had foretold was loud and unanimous enough. The acrimonious criticism of the Legislative Body, the French bonds going up at the news of a defeat, down after a victory, the indifference of the capital, the open hostility of the West and South, the scathing terms in which his own servile Senate registered his abdication, the almost indecent joy shown by large classes of the Parisian population when the Allies camped in the Champs Elysées, the hearty welcome given to foreign officers, “*nos bons amis les ennemis*,” Napoleon on his way to Elba obliged to hide or disguise himself in order to cross his whilom empire in safety, and, out of so many generals, grand dignitaries, courtiers, officials, not one voice raised in his favour! Not even Louis-Philippe, Napoleon III, and Constantine of Greece were more sharply punished by the indifference of their people.

V

And yet he came back. He came back alone, and he conquered. The Eagle did “fly from steeple to steeple to the towers of Notre Dame”; the Bourbons fled in undignified haste; a Government was improvised, an army was formed, and was able to assume the offensive. It lasted but a hundred days, yet it is one of the most fascinating romances in history, a romance fraught with consequences which are still with us. The first Napoleonic legend, the fruit of his marvellous achievements in Italy, and to which the Egyptian mirage had added a touch of Oriental magic, culminated in the success of the Consulate and the Peace of Amiens; but immediately afterwards it began to pale; long before 1814 it was threadbare and faded. It was the mad venture of the Hundred Days, it was the rout of Waterloo that revived the Legend, or created a second, a more vital one.

We shall see what it was that gave Napoleon his chance, and how marvellously he used it, in 1815, and especially in St. Helena. What we are concerned with at present

is the *popularity* of Napoleon, that popularity which was supposed to give the sole key to the success of his return. Here, again, we believe his sight was clearer than that of his modern admirers, and it is his own verdict that we shall accept.

He landed, avoided Provence and the lower Rhone valley, still irreconcilable, and went through the Alps by way of Grenoble. When he left Elba he was but a desperate gambler; at Grenoble he was already a public danger; in Lyons he became a national leader again. But he was appalled by the temper of the crowds that cheered him. It was not Napoleon the Great, Emperor of the French, King of Italy, Protector of the Rhine Confederacy, whom the people acclaimed: it was democracy, jacobinism, anti-clericalism, all the things that Napoleon had sought for thirteen years to stifle. The Bourbons had performed that miracle: by attempting—ineffectually—to efface twenty-five years of French history, they had only effaced fifteen: they had made Napoleon again the general of the Revolution, the champion of the Three Colours. But Napoleon recoiled: much as he loved power, he could not, at his time of life, become the Emperor of the Jacobins. The temporary favour that he enjoyed was therefore entirely due to an equivocation: it would not have survived six months of rule. Fortunately, the six months were not granted him, and the equivocation has become permanent.

He reached Paris, and the chestnut trees of the Tuileries decked themselves with precocious foliage to hail his return. He heard again those official praises, the value of which he had gauged long before. The *Moniteur*, which called him the *Ogre of Corsica* early in March, did homage to *His Imperial and Royal Majesty* three weeks later. But Napoleon was too much of a realist—especially after his experience in 1814—to be deceived by this smoke screen of incense. He judged his success in terms that we must consider as final: “They have allowed me to return,” he said, “just as they have allowed the others (the Bourbons) to go.” He

was unfitted, and unwilling, to be the Emperor of the Revolution; no clear-sighted observer trusted him to effect reconciliation and peace with Europe. He was, therefore, for twelve feverish weeks, a sovereign on sufferance, an Emperor by the grace of universal lassitude.

A Constitution was sketched by one of his enemies, Constant, a Constitution which he could not approve, or even understand, and which he would have swept contemptuously aside had he returned victorious from Waterloo. Not one elector in five cared to send deputies to his new Chamber, or to ratify his regime by a plebiscite. The "Field of May," in which the Constitution was promulgated, was a vain show like the Constitution itself, like the whole ephemeral Empire: Napoleon in purple cloak and velvet toque was an unfamiliar, cheaply theatrical figure. He was so pitifully weak that he had to accept Fouché as a minister, Fouché whom he wanted to shoot, who had already betrayed him, and was betraying him again. He was willing to put up with everything, popular indifference and parliamentary control, if only they would give him an army: then he would be himself again.

For a national war France could still have mustered a million men: Davoust could barely get together three hundred thousand. Napoleon took half that number into Belgium, for a last throw of the dice. His name had still some magic, and there were many who were willing to bet on him. But when the day went against the French, defeat turned at once into rout; the veterans cursed their idol, and jeered at the few officers who tried to stop their flight. Thus, in Victor Hugo's words, "vanished that noise that was the Grand Army."

When he returned to Paris all his proposals were turned down. He offered to serve, as a mere general, any provisional Government: Fouché shrugged his shoulders. He had staked his all, and lost. He fled, hesitatingly, hoping for a return of favour which did not come. When he had waited too long, and found the way to America barred by British cruisers, he surrendered to

England, knowing full well that from the French he could expect no pity. And Napoleonism seemed to vanish from France without a trace.

The Hundred Days were not therefore the epic of personal popularity. The masses were indifferent. The best of the men who served him were his former opponents, Lucien, Carnot, Constant. They wanted to save the Revolution through his sword. But he was not equal to the opportunity. He could understand neither the Liberalism of Constant, nor the Republicanism of Carnot, still less the Jacobinism of the Lyons populace. It was only after his defeat that he reconstructed what might have been.

It is on the morrow of Waterloo that the Napoleonic Legend truly begins: a thing greater and more beautiful by far than his actual career. Granted that, beneath all his imperial bluff, there had been solid achievements, still, they were purely material, and constantly obtained at the expense of variety and initiative. The colossal may be mediocre. The Legend, on the contrary, has pathos, artistic significance, spiritual grandeur. It is much more than a fairy tale: it is a symbol. And if Napoleon deserves a place in the small Pantheon of supreme individualities, it is because, after 1815, he was able to forget his own record, and to collaborate, with splendid artistry, to the elaboration of his own Myth.

BOOK II

GENESIS AND GROWTH OF THE LEGEND

“ Eux-mêmes, les fils des soldats, ne divinisent pas immédiatement le César. Leur premier regard fut plutôt un peu scandalisé. L'intermède venait d'être si cruel : la France saignée à blanc, les Alliés lui imposant une loi qu'elle semblait avoir oubliée ! Voyez quel retard mettent à se romantiser dans l'imagination de Victor Hugo les états de service de son père ! Il vit d'abord les images de sa mère. Il s'offre à relever la statue d'Henri IV, il célèbre Quiberon, la Vendée . . . Cependant, les combattants, il semble que le goût de l'action et un certain positivisme avant la lettre les maintinrent éloignés jusqu'au bout de toute espèce de transfiguration. . . .

“ Mais pour que ses fleurs apparussent, il fallut encore que le temps fit son œuvre et que le recul créât des mirages. . . . Vingt ans plus tard, c'est autre chose. Vers 1827 le mirage est formé, et le passé prend une valeur d'excitation. Le prestige est établi. Le soleil romantique a monté dans le ciel des imaginations, avec son efficace et ses nuisances. . . .

“ Ma pitié pour l'armée, pour le génie de l'Empereur, et pour la gloire. . . .”—MAURICE BARRÈS : “ Mon Grand-Père,” *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1er Octobre, 1922, pp. 483, 489-490.

Chapter I

THE FASCINATION OF NAPOLEON

I

WHEN THE YANKS flocked to Paris after the Armistice, there were two places that they immediately wanted to visit. The first was the tomb of Napoleon, the other was the Folies-Bergère. Such are the two poles of French prestige; but real France, the France of Pascal and Pasteur, lies in between, and is liable to be overlooked.

The eagerness of our boys to see with their own eyes the great shrine—which, by the way, they found choked with sandbags—was but the manifestation of Napoleon's popularity throughout America. France and the rest of continental Europe have had their fits of virulent Napoleonitis; England has remained almost completely immune; in America a mild form of the disease is endemic. Histories, engravings, canvasses, novels and plays, fashions in dress and furniture, all testify to the perennial fascination of the Corsican. Harvard Freshmen, asked to write down their favourite character in history, repeatedly gave him the first place. It is only of late years that Lincoln has been forging ahead. America, Heaven thanks, is evolving a legend of her own, much more in harmony with the facts, and much more profitable to the soul, than that of Napoleon.

This persistent Napoleon-worship in America offers a curious contrast with the present indifference of the French people. A few years ago *Le Petit Parisien* took a vote among its million readers to determine who was, in popular estimation, the greatest Frenchman in the

nineteenth century. At the top of the list came the revered name of Pasteur, Victor Hugo was second, Gambetta next, and Napoleon had to be satisfied with the fourth place. I know that the readers of *Le Petit Parisien*, a mildly democratic paper, are mere "masses." They were echoing with touching docility the opinion of their school teachers, who, in their turn, had received it ready-made from the politicians of Gambetta's era. Still, it is pretty evident that Napoleon no longer is a national idol. The centennial of his death was celebrated officially in 1921, without rousing either opposition or enthusiasm. Centennials are popular in France, if for no other reason, because each becomes a pretext for a distribution of decorations among the organizers. If France ever lacked genuine heroes or geniuses to honour, she would commemorate Quinquet, the inventor of the oil lamp; or Monsieur Bûche, the most obstinately silent of Guizot's supporters under Louis-Philippe. Did we not come perilously near erecting a monument to Hégésippe Simon, the *Forerunner*?¹ So we had a Napoleonic festival. Marshal Foch, whose unfailing good nature is so frequently imposed upon, said in fitting terms that Napoleon was a great general, but too ambitious. Monsieur Joseph Prudhomme had said it before. It is not to be expected that æsthetic Napoleonism will ever completely disappear from France. It has become one of the assets of the country, like the cell of Dantès in the Château d'If. Napoleon is a sort of family ghost, of whom people are proud, even if they do not thoroughly believe in him. His memory will be kept properly dusted as long as there are American pilgrims to visit his tomb, just in the same way as the picturesque costumes of Brittany may be saved for the benefit of transatlantic visitors. It is the American invasion that keeps Europe European.

¹ Some wag circulated a petition for erecting a statue to Hégésippe Simon, who was a myth. A few prominent politicians fell into the trap, and their letters eloquently endorsing the idea provided delightful reading when the hoax was at last revealed. The promoters were careful not to state what it was that Hégésippe Simon "foreran," but they credited him with the magniloquent motto: *Les ténèbres disparaissent quand le soleil se lève.*

For the extraordinary favour enjoyed by Napoleon in America, there were at one time historical reasons which have long ceased to operate.¹ He was the arch-enemy of England, and twisting the lion's tail was for generations a national sport. He posed as the victim of the Holy Alliance, and the Holy Alliance was particularly unholy in American eyes. "*Les ennemis de nos ennemis sont nos amis.*" In this respect, the experience of America was not radically different from that of liberal Europe. But there are other reasons that are perennial.

The first element in Napoleonic glamour is the prestige of the soldier. Ours is no doubt a civilian regime: none was ever so free from the superstition of epaulettes and brass buttons. Yet even we preserve in our hearts a lurking admiration for the man with the sword. It is not in the eyes of schoolboys and flappers only that a captain counts for more than jurist, administrator, scholar, or priest. There are few of us who are not pleasantly tickled when we are addressed as "colonel," even by a railroad porter. Our amiable fondness for that high title nonplussed at first our French friends, and led them into quaint misconceptions. We could not help smiling when Parisian papers innocently referred to Colonel House as "that grim fighter" and to Colonel Harvey as "the gallant veteran." The pleasure we find in glittering uniforms is evidenced by the street parades of our fraternal orders. It is not quite certain whether His Majesty the Average American does not love the pomp and circumstance of militarism as much as the Kaiser ever did. Only he is sensible enough to draw a sharp line between a brave show and sober policy.

We do not mean to condemn this universal fondness for the soldier as altogether childish. The army is the clearest symbol of power, the one thing for which we are all craving. It is the supreme incarnation of nationalism,

¹ The sale of Louisiana for a song, which opened an indefinite field of peaceful expansion for the United States, is not one of these reasons. It is too evident that Napoleon effected the sale, not out of any particular love for America, but because he knew he could not defend this vast and distant colony against Great Britain.

and if nationalism is not the purest form of the ideal, it seems to be the highest form accessible to vast numbers collectively. More than that, the soldier's uniform stands for personal bravery and self-sacrifice, the most obvious and also the most essential of all the virtues. It is not a prejudice obscurely transmitted from the Middle Ages that makes us respect the man-at-arms. Whoever faces unflinchingly the test of death receives thereby a sacred dignity, and the soldier is in very truth a nobleman. It may be more useful, and at times more difficult, to live than to die for one's country. But heroism is romantic, and not to be gauged by mere usefulness. When people are willing, for a bare pittance, to march through hardships to torture and death, it is the very least that the world can do to give them in exchange a halo of glory. Wars may cease, but the prestige of the army will long survive its usefulness.

Now, Napoleon is the soldier *par excellence*. From early childhood he was trained for army life, and, in spite of a temporary civilian pose under the Consulate, he remained a soldier to the end. He tried, earnestly enough perhaps, to escape from this fatality of his career, but his origins and his temper made the attempt futile, and war held him prisoner. In this exclusively military character he is unique in history. Alexander, Charles XII of Sweden, Frederick II, were born princes. He, on the contrary, "found a crown in the gutter and picked it up with his sword." Cæsar was a patrician and a statesman, who was *also* a great general. Napoleon was first and last the Imperator. His reforms tended but to turn the country into barracks from which his camps could be replenished. "I have an income of three hundred thousand men," he said. Under his reign France was not a nation defended by an army, but an army served by a nation. So Napoleon was beyond compare the greatest character in history that was fundamentally and exclusively a soldier. And whenever our irrepressible fondness for the soldier's trade wells up again, our thoughts turn instinctively towards him and do him homage.

As he said bombastically on the 18th of Brumaire, "he goes in company with the God of Fortune and of War."

There is an element of conscious artistry in Napoleon. Whatever he did, even war, he did it not for its own sake, and not exclusively for his own sake, but with an eye for the effect upon the gallery. He knew that the key to immediate success is "giving the people what they want," and he gave them, not plain war, but the grandest military show on earth. It soon palled upon the contemporaries; it would have wearied them even if they had not had such a heavy price to pay. But Posterity remains fascinated.

He was at the head of a magnificent army, inferior in spirit to that of Carnot; not superior in achievement, but incomparable in the variety and brilliancy of its costumes. "Barefooted heroes": well as that sounds in historical books, it is not so impressive in reality as the splendidly arrayed Napoleonic hosts. If we analyse the fascination of the period we shall find that much of it is due to what we may call the Murat element: Murat, the swashbuckler, the dashing cavalier, who spent twenty-seven thousand francs on plumes for the campaign of 1806. Gros, Géricault, Raffet, Charlet, Meissonnier, Caran d'Ache, Detaille, have fondly transmitted to us the innumerable details of equipment, the enormous fur cap of the Grenadiers, the busby of the Hussars, the shapka of the Polish Lancers, the green turban of the Mamelukes, the red-crested helmet of the mounted Carbineers, who wore on their breastplate a sun of gold.

The supreme stage-manager, knowing that he would seem puny by the side of a Vandamme and colourless after a Lassalle or a Murat, made use of a bold contrast. He appeared in his plain green uniform, with the legendary riding-coat of grey and the modest cocked hat with its penny cockade. He had heaped up all that splendour only to spurn it as so much dross, a romantic effect which kindred spirits, Chateaubriand and Victor Hugo, were

to remember when they planned, the one for his own tomb, the other for his own funerals.

There are dull wars and careers that are monotonously heroic. Trench warfare was unspeakably wearisome to the readers of the *communiqués*, without mentioning the sentiments of the participants themselves. But Napoleon's military drama was well composed. His blows were swift and sure, like the thrusts of wit and heroism in Shakespeare and Corneille. The scene of his exploits was kaleidoscopic. The snowfields of Eylau provided a splendid contrast for the burning sands of Egypt; the triumphs in the friendly plains of Lombardy made guerilla warfare in the desolate sierras of Spain stand out more tragically. A meticulous critic might object to one feature only; there is a certain sameness in the blows that invariably fall on the devoted head of Austria. Repetition is a sure method in a farce, but must be used sparingly in the epic. What a spectacle it was, and how cunningly interspersed with sentimental episodes! As a foil to battle-scenes, we have Napoleon's first marriage, his rupture and reconciliation with Josephine, his repudiation of her for reasons of state, his genuine fondness for his young Austrian bride, his exulting pride in the Eaglet, and the heartrending tragedy of separation.

For it is his ultimate failure that makes Napoleon such a perfect hero for a legend. Had he died on the throne, after long years of peace, or on the battlefield at the height of his military triumphs, his glory might be purer, but it would not have the same human appeal. "Nothing succeeds like success" is not completely true of the dramatic hero. Admiration must be tempered with terror and pity. Achilles is walking in the shadow of early death, Hector is doomed, Roland succumbs. Our hero must suffer and fall, like the rest of us, and partly through his own fault, like the rest of us. In this respect, neither Frederick II nor Washington can compare for a moment with Napoleon. It took the retreat from Moscow, the abdication of Fontainebleau, Waterloo, Saint Helena, the pining away of the King of Rome, to round off a

mere military show, and deepen it into a more perfect tragedy than any of Sophocles'. The unknown power that framed the destinies of Napoleon Bonaparte could have given lessons in stagecraft to Shakespeare himself.

We may add that the general public, not in America alone, but throughout the world, is morally in league with the weaker side. Napoleon, single-handed, fought a vast coalition, and we admire him for it. We do not stop to consider under what severe handicap a coalition is labouring. It is much better to be single-handed—and single-minded—than to be provided with six pairs of hands restraining one another. With united France as his instrument, Napoleon was in fact the big bully among small boys, rather than the victim of overwhelming forces unjustly banded against him. Once more, the Legend is artistic and sentimental. All judicial considerations must be brushed aside.

II

This persistent fondness for the soldier exists in a marked degree in America, the least militaristic of all great nations, but it is not special to America. On the other hand, there are certain traits in Napoleon that appeal particularly to the Western world, because they are, or seem to be, typical of its own youthful and energetic civilization. What America admires in Napoleon is the typical American.

A country swept by a revolution is in a sense virgin soil. Traditions have been broken, artificial ranks effaced. The strong man has a chance, the chance of the pioneer in exploration or in business. We admire the commercial magnate all the more for his having started as an office boy. We are proud of a country in which such careers are possible. Now, Napoleon is the type of the self-made man. Technically an aristocrat, he had to give up his minor Corsican nobility, and stood at the bottom of the scale, a subordinate officer with no handle to his name.

We love to see a man of the people rise by sheer strength of purpose, stand among those effete lords and kings of the old countries, and teach them their places. Napoleon is the greatest of all *parvenus*, and America is proud of being a *parvenu* among nations.

Let not this be taken as a jibe. *Parvenir* means to succeed, and success is frequently the reward of foresight and energy. But it must be confessed that Napoleon and America have in common some of the traits of the *parvenu*, in the usual and less complimentary sense of the term. A tendency to appraise success in material terms, for one thing. The record of France's "greatness" under the Empire reads like the report of a Boosters' Club. A deep-rooted hostility to intellectual freedom: the "Radicals," harried by Mr. Mitchell Palmer and the "Ideologists," that Napoleon wanted to drown like vermin, have a great deal in common. A certain fondness for self-assertion: for brand-new greatness cannot take itself quietly for granted. A paradoxical, but very human desire of hobnobbing with those very aristocrats whom they affect to despise: Napoleon was as eager as any comic supplement matron to have Dukes among his acquaintances. He did his very best to enlist as many as he could in his Imperial Court, and it must have been a sight for the gods to see his newly made plebeian grandees and the fossils of the Ancient Regime that he had been able to collect glare at each other in his state functions. The scene has been duplicated over and over again by successful adventurers of sundry nationalities and creeds, who attempted to gather together in their receptions the old set and the *nouveaux riches*. True to type, Napoleon wanted to marry into an old family; he secured an Archduchess very much in the same way as some fine people in Zenith (or was it Chicago?) have purchased coronets for their daughters. The besetting sin of the *parvenu* is not pride, but excessive humility.

Then we like Napoleon the Efficiency Manager. He was first of all business-like, energetic, accurate, a hard taskmaster, but a harder worker himself. He made

things hum. He kept musty state councillors at work all night. People invited to the Tuileries took the precaution of eating a good dinner beforehand, for they could not sit down until he was seated; they had to rise when he rose, and he was in the habit of bolting his food down in ten minutes. He would have enjoyed the quick service of our best lunch counters. Taking a leaf from Cæsar and Charles V, he was able to dictate to several secretaries at once, a splendid example for the modern man, who is attended at the same time by his barber, bootblack, manicure, and stenographer. Especially his talent for advertising was truly imperial. Even in the Catholic Catechism he managed to slip his own praise "next to reading matter." He has been accused of not liking the Press; he liked it so well that he wanted it all for himself. He filled the papers that he allowed to survive with *communiqués* and inspired articles. His Proclamations, his Bulletins have no purpose but to tell the world of his tremendous achievements. His triumphal monuments are, we must repeat, permanent bill boards of stone and bronze, clamouring to posterity: "Napoleon, the greatest emperor on earth; the glory is remembered after the cost is forgotten." He "sold" the Napoleonic idea; he told Europe: "Efficient service our motto. The Emperor you will eventually obey." Ponderevo was not wrong in claiming kinship with him, and a modern life of Napoleon ought to include at least one chapter written by Mr. Sinclair Lewis.

The self-made man; the hard, efficient worker; the grand master of advertising: Napoleon and our captains of industry are of the same breed. They have another trait in common, a redeeming feature, and truly heroic. He was, and they are, great gamblers, never satisfied with slow and safe prosperity. Whatever peak of success they have reached, they already scorn it and look beyond, and they are willing to stake their all on a new venture. Monsieur Joseph Prudhomme, the caricature of the French Philistine, was fond of repeating sententiously, "If Napoleon had remained a lieutenant of artillery he would

still be on the throne!"—a saying, by the way, which proves that bulls are bred elsewhere than in the Irish Free State. To play safe, to spare, to pile up *sou* upon *sou*, with ant-like industry, to retire early on a modest competency, invested in gilt-edged securities, such is the ideal of the French bourgeoisie. In this respect, at any rate, neither Napoleon nor our "magnates" are bourgeois. They want none of that stagnant quietude. After the Treaty of Amiens, when France knew for the first time in ten years the blessings of universal peace, he might have devoted his matchless ability to the delicate task of reassuring Europe, and particularly England; of reconciling the old and the new, beyond the frontiers of France as well as within. It would have been Utopian perhaps; not more Utopian, at any rate, than what he did undertake. Had he attempted that task, he might have left France as great in territories as the armies of Carnot had made her, and at the same time secure, respected, but also trusted and even beloved. This modest programme of consolidation and reconciliation did not appeal to him. He must needs control the continent, even impoverished and isolated Spain, which could not have become a danger, and whose legitimate King was subservient to his every desire. So the French Empire stretched from Portugal to Poland. We are reminded of the megalomania of certain American promoters, who flung a useless line across the deserts of Nevada and Utah, because they had dreams of a railroad empire stretching from ocean to ocean. Napoleon is the prototype of our trust builders. He attempted a gigantic "corner" in thrones and crowns, with an interlocking directorate of Bonapartes. It was not sufficient for him to dominate Western Europe, he had to try issues with Russia: another grand throw of the dice. Had he conquered, he was ready to seize Constantinople, and hurl the whole of Europe against Asia. He would have made himself Emperor of India, Emperor of China, Emperor of the World. And then, like Alexander and Mr. H. G. Wells, he would have sighed for more worlds to conquer.

For this arch-realist, this paragon of efficient executives, had his grain of mystic folly. His ambition was truly romantic, and, much as we have heard of late about "safe and sane" policies and the blessings of "normalcy," we reserve our passionate admiration for those who dream dreams and stake their all on a vision. Without that spirit of adventure mankind would not even have started chipping flint implements. Napoleon's dream failed; it failed cruelly. All sensible men knew, with Talleyrand, that it was bound to fail, and it was not even a beautiful dream. But we have such a craving for dreams that we are not very critical about their quality, just like those unfortunates who seek exhilaration in the nastiest forms of prohibition whisky. The Napoleonic dream was a coarse but clear symbol of two things which are eternally beautiful: infinite longing, and the all-conquering energy of man. In this respect he stands with the other Romantic myths, Faust and Don Juan. He attempted to quench his boundless desire with power, as Faust with learning and Don Juan with love. The attempted realization, in all three cases, may be pitifully mean, but the dream gives wings to our own imaginations, numb with the cloying dailiness of life.

This leads us to the chief reason why America still indulges the mild romantic recklessness of her Napoleon-worship; she enjoys it in the realm of mere fancy, without having seriously suffered from its sordid and tragic concomitants. Napoleon is the most thrilling of all historical films. From a distance of three thousand miles and over a hundred years, it is safe enough to say, "What a magnificent conflagration! I would not have missed it for a thousand dollars!" The people whose homes were actually burned, whose sons were actually killed, whose souls were actually cramped, to make this American holiday, may be justified if they feel less enthusiasm. It may be an excellent thing for America to express her latent Napoleonism in this harmless fashion, just as a paradoxical French critic maintained that the Palais-Royal Theatre was a very moral institution, because

it provided for blameless bourgeois matrons the safe excitement of vicarious wickedness. It is a fact that no country is actually freer from actual Napoleonism than America. When Roosevelt came back from the jungles of Africa, like Napoleon from Elba, he promptly found his Waterloo at the hands of his own countrymen ; and the very faint Napoleonic features that could be discerned in a military aspirant to the Presidency were sufficient to secure his defeat in the convention of his own party. Not only has America failed to evolve a Napoleon of her own, but she has shown no great eagerness to have one for a neighbour. When Napoleon III installed Maximilian on the crazy throne of Mexico, the United States decided that Emperors, like all forms of unsanitary picturesqueness, properly belonged to the other side of the water.

In all these respects—militarism, autocratic efficiency, *parvenu* display, self-advertisement, insatiable ambition, gambling-mania—America admires Napoleon as a hero of legend, but follows the precepts and example of Washington—Washington, the perfect contrast to the great Corsican. A soldier, too, but eager to sheathe the sword and to restore peace ; an efficient leader, but a lover of liberty ; a true democrat in the simplicity of his estate and of his life, because he was a true gentleman ; playing for high but definite stakes, and willing to quit the game when the stake was won ; whole-hearted in service, never shirking responsibility, but glad to drop the burden as soon as he could conscientiously do so ; filled with the higher ambition of leaving an untarnished rather than a dazzling name. A comparison between Napoleon and Lincoln would be striking, but not so instructive, for conditions were too different in the France of the Revolution and in the America of the Civil War. Between Washington and Napoleon, on the contrary, a parallel is perfectly fair. Napoleon himself challenged it ; it was hoped, he almost promised, that he would be a French Washington. Washington might have been tempted to become a Napoleon ; there were Napoleons of all kinds and degrees in Mexico and everywhere in South America,

and the example of Cromwell showed that a military dictatorship was not unthinkable even in an English-speaking country. Each took his choice: the one, usefulness and the quiet reverence of mankind; the other, adventure and a power of fascination that will perhaps never wane.

Chapter II

THE SPONTANEOUS ORIGINS OF THE LEGEND

IN 1814, after the capitulation of Paris ; in 1815, after Waterloo, the dominant feeling, among civilians and soldiers alike, was not humiliation, and not thirst for revenge : it was relief. The nightmare was at an end. There was nothing then in the French soul that resembled the sombre rage of Prussia after Jena, that purpose, outwardly repressed, but intense and unanimous, which was to blaze into the "heilige Wut," the sacred wrath, of 1813. The French yield to no nation in their sensitive patriotism ; the long vigil they kept between Sedan and the Marne proves this beyond doubt. In 1815 they had lost heart, not simply because they were weary, but because they had lost faith in their cause. They felt embittered indeed ; but it was chiefly against the Tyrant whose mad ambition had brought them into such a plight. Maurice Barrès, the apostle of Nationalism, is always ready to express his reverence for "the Army, the genius of the Emperor, and Glory." Yet, in editing the diary of his grandfather, an officer in the Grand Army, he notes : "The sons of the soldiers do not at first deify Cæsar. Their first impression was rather one of indignation. . . ." ¹

I

Yet there were some who, immediately and very bitterly, were made to regret Napoleon : his favourite tools, the

¹ "Mon Grand-Père," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, October 1, 1922.

professional soldiers, who were out of place in a civilian regime. It would have taken the greatest tact to pacify and re-educate these victims of a harsh destiny; the Bourbons did their very best to exasperate them. After all, it was for France, not for Napoleon alone, that they had fought in 1814 and 1815, but they were treated like a band of outlaws. "The Bandits of the Loire" was the term applied to the remnants of the Imperial Army, which had been withdrawn beyond that river. Marshal Brune was brutally assassinated, and no effort made to bring his murderers to justice. Marshal Ney, "bravest of the brave," was sentenced to face a French firing squad. On the other hand, those officers who had betrayed their flag preserved their honours and emoluments. These examples rankled in the soldiers' minds. To suffer heroically, to be defeated, to be scorned: the cup of injustice was overflowing. Treated as enemies by the Royalists, the *Brigands* became enemies, and their hatred made them rally round the memory of their old leader. Indignation was frequently expressed, in the Allied countries, because in 1918 the Germans gave a rousing reception to their returning troops. Yet it was not only generosity that prompted such demonstrations, it was plain justice, for these men, though misled, had done their duty. And it was sound political wisdom: had the German army been held responsible for the follies of the war-lords, it would have rallied passionately round the war-lords.

This injustice to the veterans was not a mere fit of ill-humour; it had long consequences. For some of these the Bourbons were hardly to blame. The new army was smaller than the old, and, naturally enough, it was to be commanded in large proportion by Royalist noblemen. The Napoleonic officers lost at the same time their occupation and their prestige. Their pitiful half-pay would not support them in decency. Long years of camp or barrack life had unfitted them for civilian pursuits, and when those men, who used to consider military rank as much higher than hereditary titles,

begged for modest employment, they were looked upon with suspicion. Hence the growth of an army of discontent, driven to Napoleonism in self-defence. It was not very numerous, for the common soldiers had gone back silently to some humble trade ; it was not composed of the best elements among the survivors of the Imperial Regime, but it was desperate. Then arose that curious type, the *Demi-Solde* (half-pay pensioner), the old swash-buckler, inured to violence, devoured with rage at his present humiliation and straitened circumstances, embittered and demoralized by idleness, a dangerous character indeed, as ready to pick a quarrel with a Royalist and to kill him in an unequal duel as Napoleon himself had been prompt to kidnap and shoot the Duke of Enghien. Some of them, in elaborating the legend of the Emperor, were not forgetting their own. A scapegrace, because he had been drafted in 1812, had a soldierly bearing, a scar, round oaths at his command, a taste for tobacco and rum, would pose as a "groggnard," an officer, a victim of the Bourbons. We have admirable portraits of the "Bandit of the Loire" turning into a common adventurer, or even into a bandit pure and simple, in the Philippe Bridau of Balzac and the Uncle Victor of Anatole France.

II

But the "Demi-Soldes" were only the vanguard of reviving Napoleonism. Men had returned with alacrity to their farm, their workshop, their little store ; it would be so good to resume home life, to sleep in a bed, to be safe, to be quiet, to escape from the petty tyranny of the bawling non-com., to cleanse one's soul from the sordid nauseating horrors of the battlefield ! There are millions of men in Europe and in America to-day who have not quite forgotten the delicious anticipation of homecoming ; the gates of a lost Paradise were opening wide again.

But, in a very few years, a change comes over the

minds of men, as it does over the landscape. Nature is merciful ; it obliterates the traces of suffering. It would be a hard task to preserve the trenches just as they were in the tragic days of 1918 ; they would crumble slowly under the rain, and wild flowers would soon veil the rusting wires. So it was after 1815. Men forgot the worst. The dead remained dead and uncomplaining ; the living no longer missed the voices that were hushed, the maimed got used to their crutches or to their empty sleeves. It was easier for them to forget than it will be for us, for France had suffered less in twenty-two years than she has in the fifty months of the late war. There had been only a few weeks' fighting on French territory ; no wholesale destruction had been wrought, and, although the Cossacks made a terrible impression on the people's imagination, the conquerors, on the whole, were not guilty of any glaring atrocities. So the most unendurable hardships, that had made the stout-hearted *grogna*rd look with envy upon the dead, began to fade—even the retreat from Moscow, the Dantesque ghastliness of the Beresina.

The men who had been torn away from the routine of their civilian life, and who had idealized it as long as it was beyond their reach, found it somewhat colourless after their return. Their thoughts went back, with a complacency which increased with the years, to the days when they were younger, more vigorous, and had seen wider horizons. And, so gradually that it never gave them a shock of surprise, they discovered that their bitterness was gone—that they half regretted the bad old days. Men who had balled their fists at Napoleon in Russia, and abandoned his eagles at Waterloo, began to play in good faith, twelve or fifteen years later, the part of the devoted soldier, who would have followed his Little Corporal to the end of the world.

The Legend did not originate with the veterans, if for no better reason, because they lacked imagination. But they did not protest against it ; they were slowly converted to it. The delicate analysis of this

process by Georges Duhamel in 1918 applies equally well to the period that followed Waterloo: "How can we defend ourselves against the Legend? It insinuates itself with such subtle prudence! It takes advantage of every weak point in our memory. Wherever oblivion creates a gap the Legend fills it with one of its rays. It falls upon the ruins like a dust of gold, and we do not protest, for the sight of those ruins was making our hearts heavy. It teaches us to lie. It has all the wiles of a courtesan; it is fairer than truth, knows it, and takes advantage of it. . . . It attacks all of us at the same time, it progresses, here and there, by minute leaps. People will tell lies in front of us, and we let them lie, for why should we reopen a sensitive wound, why should we bleed once again? Then we lie in our turn, ingenuously. At first in order not to irritate or disappoint those who ply us with questions; then in order not to irritate our own selves. Thus a time is coming when we no longer shall know what we do know. A time is coming when the Legend will have conquered. Our children will have, about war, suffering, authority, blood, glory, all sorts of false and seductive ideas, similar to those we had before 1914."¹ Duhamel protests in advance, and wants to register his testimony; Barrès, a non-combatant, whose conception of truth is more "poetical," acclaims, on the contrary, the Legend of the Great War, now obscurely growing, as the Napoleonic Legend grew from 1815 to 1825: "Seeds which have not yet come to the surface are germinating for our sons in the filled-in trenches."²

When the Legend was formed, it was difficult for the survivors to resist its fascination. They sniffed with increasing complacency the incense which the new generation burned under their nostrils. And Napoleon-worship became at last a fact among the soldiers of Napoleon, but long after the Emperor was dead.

¹ G. Duhamel, *Entretiens dans le Tumulte*, La Légende, pp. 141-2.

² "Mon Grand-Père," *loc. cit.*, p. 491.

III

The *Demi-Soldes* alone would not have moved popular imagination. The veterans were the silent accomplices, not the creators, of the myth. Two forces contributed to its formation, two forces which were quite distinct, even antagonistic at first, but which coalesced about 1828—Liberalism and Romanticism.

The earlier, the more permanent, of these two factors, was Liberalism. Romanticism, as we shall see, was for ten years the spiritual bodyguard of the monarchy. Even when these knights of the Throne and the Altar grew faint, there was no cause for the King to be dismayed. Romanticism at that time affected but a small minority even of the cultured classes. President Millerand would lose little sleep if he realized that he had forfeited the loyalty of the Post-Impressionists. It was not, therefore, the desertion of the White Flag by the Romanticists that brought about its downfall: it was the irreconcilable enmity of the Liberals. And by Liberalism we must understand in this case not so much a negative political philosophy as something more vital, more potent—a sentiment, the very definite fear of reaction.

The White Terror alone, a mere spasm, might have done no permanent injury to the Bourbon cause. But the very words in which that cause was summed up, Restoration, Legitimacy, and its symbol, the White Flag, created a feeling of ineradicable distrust. The unbridled dogmatists of absolutism and theocracy, Joseph de Maistre and Bonald, appeared to be the prophets of the new regime. All the material conquests of the Revolution, and the spiritual conquests of the Enlightenment, were challenged and seemed imperilled. The peasant dreaded the reimposition of the tithes; those who had bought the confiscated property of Church or feudal lord had to face the possibility of eviction; the educated bourgeoisie resented the insolence of the returning *émigrés*; when a law was passed punishing sacrilege with death, the

"Philosophers" saw a vision of La Barre broken on the wheel for a silly song, and the flames of the Inquisition.

There was a curious discrepancy between that fear and the actual sins of the Bourbons. We have no wish to idealize the Restoration, but on the whole its rule was quiet, economical, and surprisingly liberal. It certainly was mildness itself compared with that of Napoleon. Their worst encroachments upon the liberty of the Press seem innocent enough when we remember that the Consul and Emperor had simply suppressed all independent papers. If a Liberal member, Manuel, was expelled from the Chamber of Deputies *manu militari*, Napoleon, in two strokes of the pen, had extinguished a whole assembly, the Tribunat, guilty of discussing, according to the Constitution, the laws submitted to it. The army of Gouvion-Saint-Cyr was freer from favouritism than that of Napoleon. Private property, even of revolutionary origin, was much safer under the Bourbons than under Bonaparte. The claims of the dispossessed *émigrés* were satisfied with an indemnity of a billion francs; and, thanks to a reduction in the rate of interest, this settlement entailed no additional burden upon the national budget. The judiciary showed commendable independence, condemning the Jesuits, for instance, at the very moment when they were supposed to be all-powerful at Court. The imprisonments without warrant, the summary executions, which passed almost unnoticed under the Empire, became unthinkable under the Bourbon monarchy, as soon as the virulence of the White Terror was over.

How can we explain, then, that in spite of such a striking contrast, the Tyrant should have become the idol of the liberals, and the moderate, constitutional sovereign their *bête noire*? Through the force of symbols. Although he had striven to undo the work of the Revolution, Napoleon was its heir, and had preserved its flag. Although the Bourbons had formally or tacitly accepted all the essential reforms of that same Revolution, they were theoretically its sworn enemies. As the background of Napoleon one saw the France of 1789, the Rights of

Man and the abolition of privilege ; as the background of the Bourbons, all that the Ancient Regime had come to mean in popular imagination : injustice, caprice, scandal.

This unpopularity of the Bourbons was heightened by their close connection with the Holy Alliance. It is not human to love one's conquerors, even when they confer a benefit upon you ; and it was for the Bourbons a severe handicap that they had been brought back in the train of the enemy. In 1814 an optimist might still paint the situation in favourable colours : the Allies claimed that they had been warring against Napoleon, not against France ; their terms of peace were on the whole very moderate ; and it was a national dynasty that a national assembly had recalled. In 1815 the veil was torn. The sudden flight of the Bourbons on Napoleon's approach had shown how little genuine support they had found in the country ; their return was manifestly imposed by foreign bayonets ; and the Allies dealt much more harshly than the year before with the " incorrigible " nation that had just given them such an unpleasant shock. For the sake of peace, the French accepted their King with resignation, but it was evident that, as soon as the wounds caused by the war were healed, the resentment of a proud people would assert itself. Only if the Bourbons and their fellow-kings had ruled with justice and generosity could that resignation have turned into respect, gratitude, loyalty. But such was not the case. Discontent was rife, and not least in the victorious countries. This universal dissatisfaction with the Holy Alliance caused a revival of Napoleonism, a revival which was earlier and more intense abroad than in France. We must seek to account for this curious phenomenon.

IV

The protracted war between France and the rest of Europe, like the recent Great War against the Central

Powers, had been waged with many different motives. The kings were defending their domains against an all-devouring conqueror; they were fighting against the supremacy of a single nation; they were attempting to preserve the old balance of power; and from this point of view their coalitions were not fundamentally different from those formed against Louis XIV. But they were also combating the principles and the legislation of the French Revolution; the purely dynastic struggle was also a reactionary crusade. The Napoleonic compromise, which was reactionary in France, the home of the Revolution, was revolutionary in the rest of Continental Europe. Instances of such differences in the appreciation of the same political ideal, on both sides of a given frontier, are not lacking in our own days. The safest and sanest of British, French, or American statesmen, if they had transferred their activities to Tsarist Russia a quarter of a century ago, would have been suppressed as firebrands; and there is in Soviet Russia a conservative party called the Social Revolutionists, a name which, in the Western democracies, would be thought flamboyant enough. At home, Napoleon was a more successful Kolchak or Wrangel, a Mannerheim, a Horthy on a larger scale; abroad, he was still "a Robespierre on horseback" or a Lenin. In fighting him, the kings of Europe were resisting Imperialism, and their cause was just; but they were also attempting to block the spread of the Rights of Man.

The peoples, as distinct from the kings, were also inspired by mixed motives. They wanted to be independent from French rule, even when, as in the case of Spain, French rule was much more enlightened than the home product, for self-government is more precious to man than good government. In order to face the vast national armies of France, the kings were gradually compelled to appeal to the national sentiment of their respective countries. But such an "appeal to the people" contained an element of democracy. In order to conquer Napoleon, his opponents had to become, like Napoleon

himself, sovereigns "by the will of the people" as well as "by the grace of God." The national upheaval of 1813 implied a partnership between king and people. Prolonged warfare almost invariably produces a compromise, and sometimes an actual exchange, between the ideals of the combatants. In the struggle which had begun in 1792, Revolutionary France had fallen a prey to autocracy, conservative Europe had adopted the fundamental principle of democracy. There is no other foundation for the enthusiasm which in 1813 turned the coalition against Napoleon from a mere diplomatic alliance into a Pan-European crusade.

But as soon as Napoleon was safe under lock and key the kings broke faith with their peoples. Perhaps the term is unduly harsh: let us say that there had been a tacit understanding, and that the two sides had not tacitly understood the same thing. The peoples were filled with the national-liberal ideal; the kings offered them the old dynastic rule, with the hoary principle of legitimacy. Poland, Germany, Italy, were yearning for national independence and unity. Metternich and his peers understood nothing but the interests of thrones and crowns, the maintenance of the *status quo* at home and abroad, the balance of power. Diplomacy remained as selfish, as devoid of any truly national ideal, of any respect for principle, of any sense of living reality, as it had ever been in the eighteenth century. The Grand Alliance was perpetuated, but it became an alliance for keeping subject nationalities in subjection, divided nationalities in division, and the people in its proper place, which was to serve, not to discuss. It was planned to make the world safe from democracy. It was directed no longer against France, but against the Revolution, against the Rights of Man, against the people everywhere. And they called it, without conscious irony, "the Holy Alliance."

In their bitter disappointment, the peoples began wondering whether, in supporting their "legitimate" sovereigns against the crowned soldier of the French

Revolution they had not put their money on the wrong horse. They gave Napoleon credit for all the work of the Constituent Assembly and of the Convention that he had not yet managed to destroy. He became the hero of liberalism everywhere—in Poland, in Italy, in Southern Germany; even, though in a far lesser degree, in Prussia and in Spain. The cause of this favour was to a large extent negative; it was not so much his achievements that were appreciated as the fact that he had been the arch enemy of hated and despised masters. This is expressed very clearly in the epilogue of *War and Peace*. Denisof is a dashing hussar, intensely patriotic, not particularly liberal, and who had never indulged in the Jacobinism, Gallomania, and Napoleon-worship of his friend Pierre Bezukhoi. However, in 1820, disappointed with the turn of affairs in Court circles, he cries out: "Once upon a time you had to be a German; now you must dance with Tatawinova and Madame Kwüdener. Okh! If we could only set our bwave Bonaparte upon them! He would dwive the folly out of them!"¹

V

Although Romanticism did not triumph in French literature until the twenties of the nineteenth century, it was already full blown in Chateaubriand, and even in Rousseau. It may have been heightened or hastened by the tremendous spectacles of the Revolution and the Empire; it certainly was not created by them, as M. Barrès seems to believe. In this section we shall deal with Romanticism as a force in French public opinion, and not as an artistic school; but we shall have to use literary men as the symbols of their generation, for the obvious reason that they alone gave enduring form to transient feelings. To give permanency to the evanescent

¹ *War and Peace*, Epilogue, Part I, ch. xiv. We are not quoting a work of fiction as an authority, but only as a more vivid statement of the case than we could hope to give in our own words. However, if any novel could be used as a historical document, it would be Tolstoy's masterpiece of epic realism.

is the proper task of literature. But, by the side of the half-dozen men who sang audibly and whose voices are still heard, we must imagine a thousand mute poets thrilled with the same hopes and the same despairs.

The individual in rebellion against the artificial trammels of social life: this is widely accepted as the essence of Romanticism. Sheer rebellion, however—the Byronic pose—is a minor element which all the great Romanticists soon transcended. They were dissatisfied with the oppressive dullness of their own time and country, but they dreamed at least of an “Elsewhere,” a *milieu* in which they could breathe joyously. From Rousseau to Victor Hugo, they were prophets of Utopia and Uchronia.

Now Romanticism, already conscious in Chateaubriand, and latent in his contemporaries, could not find satisfaction in the Revolution and the Empire. This at first astonishes us, for we are inclined to identify Romanticism with the love of excitement and picturesqueness, and it seems to us that the period between 1789 and 1815 offered a most romantic spectacle. But our impression is really an anachronism. History, foreshortened in the perspective of our memory, becomes much more vivid, much more vital, than it was to the participants themselves. The drudgery disappears; the results stand out in bold relief. But the swiftest campaign, which, in narrative, holds us breathless, meant for the troopers weeks of weary marching, and foraging three times a day for elusive rations. What the sensitive souls of the time felt most intensely was not the titanic strivings of the Revolution, or the dazzling achievements of the Empire: it was the coarseness, the intellectual mediocrity, the repression of the individual, the imposition of laws more formal, more oppressive in their dull logic than the picturesque traditions of the Ancient Regime. The Empire was romantic indeed, but for one person only, the Emperor. He exemplified on a solid stage that formidable expansion of the individual, that ceaseless quest for the unattainable, which poets could only feel in their souls. And because

his position at the apex of the world was essentially romantic, that great realist, that born classicist, felt and spoke at times like a romanticist. But for all his subjects his Empire was the least romantic thing in the world: it embodied efficiency, material success, rigid discipline. It was oppressive in the sense which is most real to poets; it was tedious. Had Napoleon lived and ruled until 1835, the Romanticism of that period would in all likelihood have remained absolutely free from Napoleonism.

It was, therefore, far away from the brutally Philistine reality of the Imperial regime, far beyond the bourgeois corruption of the Directoire, that Romanticism sought its ideal. The France of 1815 could hardly place her dream, like Shelley's, in the golden mist of the future; for the apparent failure of optimistic radicalism had been too complete. Not Arcadia, but the Terror, was thought to lie that way. So it was towards the past that the poets turned their eyes. Even the classical monarchy of Louis XV and Louis XIV was too close at hand, too well remembered, with its innumerable prosaic weaknesses, with the pomposity of its grandeur and the futility of its elegance. Imagination had to go much farther back, into those Middle Ages ignored or derided for three centuries, and which their very remoteness surrounded with romance, like a forest of faerie. Already under Napoleon a *Troubadour* style had found favour, idealizing the monk, the baron, the crusader.¹ France wanted Charlemagne and Saint Louis to return.

The twenty-five years that elapsed between the outbreak of the Revolution and the downfall of Napoleon, interrupting the normal course of the monarchy, created a false historical perspective. The Bourbons had been so completely forgotten that, when they were brought to mind again, they seemed to belong to the legendary past. The classical period and the Middle Ages became

¹ Signs of the returning favour of the Middle Ages can be seen in the *Tancrède* of Voltaire, as early as 1760. The song of Queen Hortense, "Partant pour la Syrie," is a fair example of this mongrel Pre-Romanticism.

linked as a single "Ancient Regime," surrounded with a mystic halo. According to the bold ellipsis of his confessor, Father Edgeworth, Louis XVI was no longer the grandson of that profligate dilettante, Louis XV, but "the son of Saint Louis."¹

What Romanticism expected of the restored monarchy was to give at least an echo of the old days of chivalry and faith. It is not impossible to conceive of a Prince sharing the aspirations of his age, a Romanticist at heart, who could have played, half sincerely, the part for which he was cast. We have seen in the nineteenth and even in the twentieth centuries such "knights in shining armour." One ended in insanity, after dotting with dream castles the lakes of Bavaria. Another managed to impress not a few of his contemporaries for nearly thirty years. Had the King offered France the mediæval pageant for which the poets were craving, monarchy might have retained its prestige all through the Romantic crisis.

But the actual Bourbons who returned in 1814 and 1815 were the very last men to play such a part. It took little time to realize that "Louis XVIII was not Saint Louis, any more than the future Charles X was Charlemagne." Instead of the Christian hero, with the cross on his breast and the sword in his hand, France saw an obese and amiable fossil of the eighteenth century, thoroughly sceptical, witty in a facile, ineffectual way—a King not antique, but antiquated, without the majesty of genius, courage, or even sorrow. And with him returned all those aristocrats who had learned nothing and forgotten nothing, the remnants of a decadent age, grown musty on the shelves of the *émigration*. The Romanticists made valiant efforts to love, honour, and obey these feeble, smirking ghosts of pseudo-classicism and the Pompadour era. The fact that the Bourbons preserved the loyalty of the younger generation for nearly ten years shows

¹ Father Edgeworth was reported to have said to Louis XVI on the scaffold: "*Fils de Saint Louis, montez au ciel.*" At any rate, the words were used in a popular engraving soon after the tragedy.

how complete the eclipse of Napoleonism must have been.

A great effort was made to whip up that flagging loyalty. Charles X was crowned in the Cathedral of Rheims. The Holy Chrism of Clovis was miraculously found again. The King touched patients to cure them of scrofula (the "king's evil"). Lamartine, then at the height of his success, and that young prodigy, Victor Hugo, were among the official bards. But Béranger sent forth his mocking song, "The Coronation of Charles the Simple." And at the crowing of the Gallic cock, daylight could already be seen through the senile bodies of that spectral Court.

It was this sentimental disappointment—which Chateaubriand alone was bold enough to confess—that gave the Napoleonic legend a chance. In his turn, Napoleon enjoyed the advantage of a triple remoteness: defeat, exile, death. The martinet, the bureaucrat, the Philistine, that entered so largely into his make-up, were forgotten. What remained was in sharp contrast with the effete Bourbons. His voice was full and commanding, compared with their refined cackle. And as we shall see, that voice, in Saint Helena, had assumed a new tone. He was basing his claims no longer on his achievements, but on his aspirations. He had turned himself into a Prometheus or a Messiah. And Romanticism, eternally weary with actual life, followed the *Fata Morgana* of Napoleonism.

About 1824 Liberalism everywhere was assuming a Napoleonic tinge. Romanticism, however, had not yet confessed its disappointment, and was still rendering lip-service to the legitimate monarchy. But within the next three or four years a decided change took place, and Romanticism rallied to the Liberal-Bonapartist standard. Once more the prestigious personality of Chateaubriand led the way, although he refused to go the whole of the way. Still sentimentally committed to the Bourbons, he attacked their regime with that bitterness which can be

expected only of "candid friends." But his hostility was not entirely the result of his wounded pride. In his pose as the Cassandra of a doomed dynasty there were mingled, with the spite of the politician out of office, the wisdom of a clear-sighted statesman and the disgust of a poet, weary with the royal idol he had himself erected.

But the chief occasion of the Romantic change of heart was the Greek war of independence. This war appealed to every fibre in the Romantic nature: it was heroic, it was dazzling with Oriental colour, it was a struggle between the Cross and the Crescent, and it had enlisted the services of the poet who, even more than Chateaubriand, was the master of the young generation, Lord Byron. Now, the Holy Alliance, with its insane dread of change, was discountenancing the efforts of the Greeks; the rift between Courts and nations was growing more irremediable. When "legitimacy" was understood to extend to Turkish misrule, when Navarino was referred to as an "untoward incident," the Romanticists were ready to go over to the Liberal camp, which was permeated with Bonapartism. It was thus partly by way of Missolonghi that Napoleon recovered his popularity in France.

The coalescence of Romanticism and Liberalism opened the most active period in the development of the Legend, for the vague aspirations that we have been attempting to trace were henceforth to be expressed by the most ardent generation in the whole range of French literature—the most talented perhaps and, without doubt, the most noisy.

Chapter III

THE SYSTEMATIC CULTIVATION OF THE LEGEND—THE CAMPAIGN OF SAINT HELENA—LOUIS-PHILIPPE

I

THE ORIGINATOR of the Napoleonic Legend is none other than Napoleon himself. That great realist was even greater as an illusionist. His achievements in war and politics were but the raw material out of which he produced his real masterpiece, the impression that he has left on the minds of men. The greater the discrepancy between the facts and the effect they produced, the greater his genius appears—his genius, if not as an emperor, at least as an impresario.

In 1800 France wanted peace and order. He made her believe that he could give her both. The peace was short-lived, and followed by a violent recrudescence of continuous war; the order was of that superficial kind which covers up symptoms instead of curing their cause. Between the grandiose promises and their mediocre fulfilment there was an abyss. But, for a few months, the illusion of fulfilment was created. So sudden, so complete, was his apparent success, that the impression was profound; the disappointment which was bound to follow did not have the same dramatic quality: it was gradual. We know exactly the time when a large number of French citizens pledged their faith to Bonaparte; we cannot tell when confidence began to die in the heart of one silent individual after another. Thus arose, unchallenged for ten years, what we may call the First Legend, the Legend

of the Consulate, Napoleon the Lawgiver, the restorer of religion, the saviour of France and of society.

However, before 1814, that Legend had worn thin. Disenchantment was universal, and hostility was kept down only by police measures. The Consular prestige would not have any virtue left to-day if, in 1815, Napoleon had not started a bolder legend still: he presented himself as the champion of democracy. It was not "the nephew of Louis XVI" that returned from Elba; it was the revolutionary general, chosen by the will of the people to defend their conquests. Audaciously, brazenly, he effaced ten or twenty years from his career. He bade France forget the restoration of hereditary, the creation of a Court, the suppression of all liberties, the formula "I am the State" affirmed more emphatically than it had ever been by Louis XIV. Did France forget at his bidding? Not quite; there was more weariness than enthusiasm in the state of mind that made his adventure possible. But this passive adhesion was sufficient to give him a chance; he managed to create an equivocation. And he had been served miraculously by the conduct of the Bourbons.

It is easy for us to be wise after the event. We know that, after a brief orgy of reaction, the Restoration quieted down into a very tolerable regime, not strong, not inspiring, but sufficiently firm and decently moderate. But the *émigrés* had shown their worst side at the beginning. Totally ignorant of the real temper of France, believing that they had been called back in a passion of national repentance, they indulged freely at first, in words even more than in deeds, their reactionary fanaticism, exasperated by twenty years of exile. How far would they go? Who could prophesy? The people were justified in wondering whether their rage, feeding on its very success, would cease until every trace of the Revolution had been destroyed. And, whilst France was thus doubting, Napoleon came back with fair words, and the Tricolour.

It is unlikely that his liberal supporters in 1815 cherished

any deep illusion about his sincerity. Still, he might be used to save the Revolution; they would see to it that he should never again be strong enough to destroy it. So his brother Lucien, who posed as a Republican, and had been sulking in his tent during the Empire, rallied to him. So did Lazare Carnot; and, after swearing—in writing, too!—that he would never, so did Benjamin Constant.

We have indications that, in returning as a Liberal, Napoleon was not even half sincere. He groaned when they presented to him a parliamentary constitution. But if he did violence to his nature in accepting Constant's draft, he refused to go a step farther in the direction of democracy, and to become the Cæsar of the Jacobins. He was willing to go back to 1799, not to 1793. The spirit of 1793, if it could have been roused again by such men as Carnot, and served by Napoleon's executive and military skill, might have given France victory. But Napoleon knew that the same spirit, once awakened, would never have brooked the kind of sovereign that he meant to be. His refusal to attempt the grandiose adventure of a new revolutionary crusade must be registered to his credit. In so doing he acted honestly, and he acted wisely. For such a crusade could have led but to a more crushing disaster.

The promises of 1800—peace, order, and liberty—had not been wholly fulfilled. The same promises, reiterated in 1815, could not have been fulfilled at all. On account of the European situation, Napoleon could maintain himself in France only through victory; but if he had been victorious, his renewed prestige and his material power would have proved too great a temptation for his autocratic nature. The "Additional Act to the Constitution of the Empire" was doomed to the scrap-basket, and if Lucien, Carnot or Constant had not been satisfied with silent sinecures, the road to exile was open. The disappointment of the Liberals would have been much more rapid than after the 18th of Brumaire. Had Fate given Napoleon one victorious campaign and six

months of rule, he would have had rope enough to hang himself. But Fate dealt more kindly with its devotee : defeat came at once, before the bluff of the Liberal Empire could be called. Waterloo saved the fame of Napoleon.

The Hundred Days were in every respect a disaster for France. The cost of that romantic dash, in lives, in money, in territory, was heavy enough, but heavier still was the price in heightened diffidence and hatred. Between France and Europe, between France and her dynasty, reconciliation was much more difficult in 1815 than in 1814. For Napoleon, however, that mad venture was a personal triumph. A slight twist given to the facts could represent him as reconquering his throne alone, against the organized forces of a kingdom. He was able to pose, in the eyes of the rising generation, as the champion of the Revolution against the Ancient Regime, as the defender of France against the coalition of her foreign enemies. There was in that romance the grain of truth which makes lies perfect, and the crash came so soon that the imposture could not be exposed.

From the morrow of Waterloo, the life of Napoleon was devoted to the elaboration of the Legend. He concentrated upon that sole aim the remnants of an activity which once had filled Europe with wonder and fear. He was the Prometheus of Democracy, chained by the jealous Olympians on his Caucasus ; and poor Sir Hudson Lowe was perforce cast for the part of the vulture eternally gnawing the liver of the demigod. This was good melodrama—good epic, if you please—but it was not the truth. He was not a victim, and he had no right to identify his cause with that of democracy.

He was not a victim. In 1814 the Allies had shown themselves extremely considerate with him ; after all, he was the son-in-law of the Austrian Kaiser ! He had been given an island which, as a kingdom, was microscopic, but was magnificent as a private estate. He had retained his title and the rudiments of a Court. No

sovereign, even though his line be eight hundred years old, was treated with such favour after the storm of 1818. In 1815 no such leniency could be expected. The French Government would probably have given him what short shrift he himself had granted the Duke of Enghien ; worse still, it might have sentenced him to the living death of a dungeon. It is doubtful whether Prussia would have been more generous. England herself could not have opened to him the road to free exile, or kept him on parole within her own territory. His word had been proved repeatedly to be worthless. He was only forty-six years of age, and eternal conspiracies were to be feared. He was spared the useless ordeal of a trial. He was sent to an island, remote indeed, but not unhealthy. And he was placed in the custody of a man who was by nature neither cruel nor even vulgar—only meticulous, and overwhelmed by the sense of his responsibility. In giving him Saint Helena as his prison, England served his fame well. Not even confinement in a dark cell of the Tower of London would have been so romantic as this Byronic isolation in the boundless waste of the Southern Atlantic. It seemed, indeed, as in Pérès' clever myth, that the Sun god, arisen out of the ocean, was setting in the ocean again. Saint Helena is a name to conjure with, compared with Chislehurst, Doorn, or Madeira.

II

The literature directly inspired by Napoleon at Saint Helena fills many shelves. To his own contributions were added the Memoirs of Montholon, Las Cases, Gourgaud, O'Meara, Antommarchi—without counting such spurious but influential works as the *Manuscript arrived from Saint Helena by Unknown Means*. These apologetic efforts may roughly be classed under three heads.

His first aim was to rouse sympathy with his present plight, and to make his gaolers odious. In this he was signally successful for the time being. The opposition in England made capital out of the "disgraceful methods"

of the Government ; and the tradition of his " martyrdom," although disproved, lingers even to-day in popular imagination. The actual record of his petty warfare with Sir Hudson Lowe affords no pleasant reading. If the British official cannot be absolved of unnecessary punctiliousness, the prisoner shows himself even more deficient in magnanimity. The selfish and histrionic elements in his nature appear nakedly. The best that can be said of this " last phase " is that disappointment, idleness, and disease, preying upon Napoleon's frame, had left him morbid and irritable.

The second element was a review and a defence of his whole career. It ought to have been of commanding interest to the historian ; the chief witness was at last in the stand. As a matter of fact, the importance of these parts is curiously slight. The events were well known ; he brought out no sensational revelation, and no one would trust the interpretations that he had to offer. It was but a retrospective continuation of that official literature—Bulletins and Proclamations—which the world had long learned to discount. It leaves his fame intact ; it brings out no glaring and unconscious confession of futility as we find in the Kaiser's Memoirs. But it adds nothing to his fame, and Napoleon himself can never be quoted as an authority about Napoleon.

The third element is by far the most important. Rising above the mean squabbles of his captivity, and the useless justification of details in his government or in his campaigns, he indulged in a bold reconstruction of history, in the mapping out of a Uchronia which the reactionary jealousy of Europe had alone prevented him from turning into a reality. Had Russia been defeated in 1812, " I would," he said, " have associated my son in the Empire, my dictatorship would have ended, my constitutional rule would have begun. . . . I asked for twenty years. Destiny gave me thirteen." ¹

¹ In 1820 he dictated to Montholon the sketch of a Constitution for the reign of Napoleon II. The Press was to be free. Judges were to be irremovable. All Frenchmen would have the right of bringing before the ordinary courts an action against any agent of the administration.

Of this entrancing political romance, his Testament may be considered as the symbol. It is clever, specious, and effective. The sentiments he expresses in it are strained; they are in plain contradiction with the known facts of his life, and even with details that come out in the will itself. For if the "dying hero" professes Christian piety and forgives all his enemies, the Corsican adds a codicil in favour of a would-be murderer of Wellington. His bequests, which ran into millions, were an audacious bluff. Bonaparte, the private citizen, had no legitimate property to leave; the resources of the Emperor were those of France herself, and no longer under his control; and even if he had been entitled, on his first abdication, to the 200,000,000 francs of the Imperial Domain, that sum ought to have been confiscated in 1815, in part payment for the expenses of the Hundred Days. "Qui casse les verres les paie." It probably did not much matter to him whether these bequests were actually paid: he had earned gratitude with a few scratches of his pen, and accumulated more odium upon the head of his successors. The last words, "I want my remains to repose on the banks of the Seine, in the midst of that French people I have loved so well," ring with a theatrical tremolo which never fails to appeal to the unsophisticated.

His legacies to modern France, the liberty, the prosperity, the grandeur that he had planned to give her, were of the same unsubstantial nature. He was drawing freely on an account which was no longer in his name. He could be liberal, both with his millions and with his reforms, now that both were only stage money in the drama he was composing. An ounce of performance in 1804 would have been worth a ton of promise in 1820.

The Chambers would have the right of amendment. They could propose laws on their own initiative. Foreign and domestic policies were to be completely under parliamentary control. If a Chamber should be dissolved by the Emperor, another assembly was to meet within twenty days. Every deputy accepting an office must resign his seat. The European programme of Napoleon comprised the creation of free nationalities and the democratization of Spain and England.

No one denies that there was a substantial element of truth in Napoleon's fable. There had been a Revolution, without which he would have remained an obscure artillery officer; many of his marshals and grand dignitaries had risen from the people; he himself had been the general, Consul, and even Emperor of the French Republic.¹ The steps in his accession to power had been ratified by popular vote, and he had not discarded the symbol of the new France, the tricolour of 1789. True enough. But he did not mention—perhaps he did not fully realize—that from the 18th of Brumaire he had turned his back on the Revolution and destroyed as much of its work as he dared. His increasing purpose had been to found a "fourth race," the Napoleonides, as legitimate as the Merovingians, Carolingians, or Capetians. He had sought to link his fate with that of the ancient dynasties of Europe—Baden, Wurtemberg, Austria, and, indirectly, with the Bourbons themselves. There is no doubt, therefore, whither he was tending, and his democratic pose was to a large extent a piece of splendid mendacity.

Yet, as his single aim was to rule—it mattered little by what right—his principles were never far ahead of his achievements, and he could recall them and shift them, as occasion required, without too glaring an inconsistency. Just as the evolution of his plebeian Empire towards "legitimacy," although manifest, was never complete, his faith in the divine right of sovereigns, although growing, was not absolute. So there was still in him a dormant democracy, which the crash of 1814 awoke. When they tore his crown from him, he was quite sincere in rediscovering that he was, after all, General Bonaparte. No one will boast more ardently of his popular origins than the man who, attempting to enter the sacred precincts of the aristocracy, has just been expelled as a commoner. It was only after the kings of Europe had declared themselves to be, on principle, his irreconcilable

¹ For several years French coins bore the words: "*République Française, Napoléon, Empereur.*"

enemies, that he found out he was their enemy as well. When they refused to take him seriously as the nephew of Louis XVI, he remembered his mother, the Revolution.

It is easy to see how Napoleon could delude himself, how he could reach at least that degree of temporary and superficial self-delusion which is indispensable to the great actor. But how did he manage to fool even a notable minority of the people? Because the vices that were inherent in his Empire had not had time to become manifest. Twenty years were necessary to expose him: Destiny gave him only thirteen. He had destroyed civic equality by the restoration of a nobility. Sergeant Lefebvre, Marshal of the Empire and Duke of Danzig, might boast, "I am an ancestor!" With the hereditary principle, an aristocracy of ancestors would inevitably become an aristocracy of descendants, and privilege would take the place of achievement. But it had not come to that: the titles were still borne by those who had won them, and they seemed merely to add a new lustre to democracy. He had destroyed liberty. But Liberty is an aristocratic goddess. We all love liberty—our liberty. But we wish she would not insist upon bringing with her Responsibility and Tolerance, who are far less agreeable. Napoleon did not become unpopular with the masses because he was a despot: he became unpopular because of conscription and the Continental blockade. He could boast without fear of contradiction that he represented democracy, because Demos did not know then what democracy meant. The French were flattered to know that their humble vote had been solicited to make an all-powerful Emperor; the more powerful he was, at home as well as abroad, the more flattered they were. They cared little whether Benjamin Constant were free to deliver speeches that they would never hear, or Madame de Staël free to write books that they (*O fortunatos nimium . . .*) would never read. Cæsarism and Democracy are not incompatible; indeed, a cynic might remark that, since a military democracy is, of all

forms of government, the simplest and coarsest, it is also the most "democratic."¹

III

The Napoleonic paradox—perhaps the term is more fitting than fallacy—would never have found acceptance if his victors had shown what genuine Liberalism was. As we have seen, their absolutist principles roused opposition, their lack of prestige facilitated its growth, their feeble reactionary policy, annoying rather than oppressive, was unable to check it. There was little competition to be feared from the Republicans; all the excesses of the Revolution were still associated with the name of the Terror, all its conquests with the name of Bonaparte. So the Napoleon traders had a splendid market for their ware.

The death of the Emperor removed the last obstacle to their success. It should be noted that public opinion did not rally to Napoleon until France was quite safe against another return. In other words, Napoleonism arose out of sentimentalism rather than conviction. The principal part in the systematic elaboration of the Legend was naturally played by literature, the literature of Saint Helena first of all, then an avalanche of memoirs and souvenirs, then history, drama, lyric and epic poetry. This aspect of the question is so complex and so important

¹ In his scholarly work, *Les Origines de la Légende Napoléonienne* (Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1906), M. Philippe Gonnard restricts the meaning of the word Legend to that systematic distortion of Napoleon's career in the light of retrospective Liberalism—Napoleon the champion of struggling nationalities and of democracy. He establishes that, as long as Napoleon had even a gleam of hope that he or his son could be restored, he was careful not to commit himself to the Liberal cause. It is a delicate task to distinguish, in the vast literature of Saint Helena, Napoleon's pose from his genuine opinions. All the memorialists are but the tools of the imperial comedian: in Gourgaud alone echoes of more sincere confessions can be detected. It is, however, dangerous to use Gourgaud as an authority against Las Cases, Montholon, and Napoleon himself: for the man has a way of obtruding his personality, and that personality is a very uncertain element. He is known to have played a part for a while—but how long, with what degree of sincerity, and why did he drop the mask? M. Gonnard shows his best skill in extracting evidence from the most unreliable witness.

that we must reserve it for a chapter apart. But literature, even in its widest sense, was only one of the vehicles of Napoleonomania. Anecdotes began to grow, rankly; historical words took wings, sometimes to the embarrassment of the survivors, like blunt General Cambronne. The properties of the imperial stage were turned with great profit from junk into relics. Napoleon found a more ubiquitous immortality than the one he had sought in the canvasses of David or Gros, in the bronze of his columns, in the stone of his arches; his likeness was hawked about in the cottages of the peasants, those peasants who, fifteen years before, had so bitterly cursed his "infernal columns." It appeared in penny lithographs, broadsides from Epinal, chapbooks, napkin rings, beer jugs, tobacco jars, cane heads, pocket knives, clay pipes, and ginger cakes. A host of manufacturers and peddlers took advantage of the craze. For a while advertisement and propaganda were one: they were stimulating the demand as well as supplying it. When this Napoleonic deluge receded, it left France covered with commercialized imperial bric-à-brac. Those who had bought Napoleonic ware, because everybody was doing it, came to believe that they had acted out of genuine sentiment. Thus, partly out of "souvenirs" manufactured by the gross, were made those "Memories of the people" that Béranger was to sing so effectively.

When the Bourbons collapsed in 1830 there was already in France enough diffused Bonapartism to make the venture of a Second Empire worth trying—if only there had been an Emperor. But the Eaglet was merely the Duke of Reichstadt. If the shadow of death had not been upon him there was only one chance of his acting as a pretender to the Imperial throne: it was that Metternich should push him as a pawn in his diplomatic chess game, and Metternich was incapable of such wild gambling. Some other personage—a prince, a general—might have been chosen as provisional head of the restored Empire; but the party was deficient in leadership. The members of the Imperial family, the marshals, the great

functionaries, just because they had seen Napoleon at close range, did not share the delusions of the crowd. Many of them had accepted the Restoration; practically all would have been satisfied with a liberal evolution of the monarchy. So Bonapartism had to remain vaguely mingled with liberalism, with patriotism, with democracy, with romanticism; and the incarnation of the Legend was postponed by eighteen years.

The regime which, through clever manipulations, was established in July 1830, did not fail to appreciate the potency of Napoleonic sentiment. So the bourgeois monarchy began cultivating the Legend more sedulously than the Bonapartes themselves. Not that Louis-Philippe felt the need of taking the wind out of a rival's sail. Political Bonapartism seemed extinct; there was not even an active pretender until 1836, and the two attempts made by Louis-Napoleon at Strasbourg and at Boulogne seemed to reveal only the hopelessness of his cause. The motives of the Citizen-King, in thus making himself the chief advertising agent of the Empire, were more subtle, and, we may add, more generous than the mere necessity of checkmating a competitor. In the light of history, the conduct of Louis-Philippe appears suicidal, yet for many years it might well seem masterly in its combined generosity and Machiavellianism.

The July Monarchy is a period which fills no one with enthusiasm. In its defence it must be said that it attempted to bring together the tattered fragments of French tradition, and to heal the wounds of the civil war, which, open or latent, had torn France asunder since 1789. Louis-Philippe considered himself in all sincerity as the heir of the whole past. A prince of the royal blood, he had served under the tricolour flag and won his spurs at Valmy; he had been sponsored by Lafayette, the hoary idol of liberalism, as "the best of Republics": he was thus the mediator between the Ancient Regime and the new. In the same spirit of accepting and reconciling all the legacies of a splendid and

tragic past, he wanted to be also the successor of Napoleon, whose flag he had restored, and whose administrative system he maintained. The fifteen years of the Corsican's rule could not be blotted out of history. They must be absorbed, "integrated," as M. Maurras would say, into the enriched life of modern France. "Eclecticism" was the order of the day. Casimir Delavigne and later Ponsard in literature, Paul Delaroche in painting, represented that "common sense" policy of seeking the best that can be found in conflicting doctrines. Victor Cousin was combining Plato, Saint John, Kant, Hegel and some would add Scapin, into his philosophy of *The True, the Beautiful, and the Good*. The political eclecticism of Louis-Philippe belongs to the same stratum of thought: it lacks originality, but it is full of excellent intentions. It inspired him with the plan for lifting the curse that weighed on the Palace of Versailles, and turn the vast deserted galleries into a historical museum, devoted to "all the glories of France," a project nobly conceived, although its realization suffered from the incurable Philistinism of its royal promoter. To placate the disciples of the Revolution, he turned the Church of Saint Geneviève into a Pantheon again. He restored the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, which Bonaparte had suppressed, because it continued the free, critical spirit of the eighteenth century. To please the lovers of the remote past he encouraged mediæval studies and the restoration of Gothic churches. To win over the worshippers of Napoleon, he showered favours upon the survivors of the Empire, and completed the monuments which that regime had left unfinished. It is obvious that we do not mean to give Louis-Philippe credit for all the details of such a policy: we are using his name as the symbol of a class and of a state of mind which dominated after 1830, and with which he was, on the whole, in complete sympathy. So far, his motives and his methods are unimpeachable. He was playing to the gallery, no doubt, but that is the essential part of a king's business.

But the July Monarchy went farther than that, much farther than was warranted by its own convictions. It attempted to use the glory of Napoleon, all too cleverly, for purposes of its own. Louis-Philippe, who was not lacking in personal courage, was a convinced lover of peace. He believed, with orthodox Christianity and the Manchester school, that there had never been a good war or a bad peace, a worthy sentiment, which his enemies translated into the ignominious terms: Peace at any price. He was also persuaded that such a policy, if it were too openly professed, would be unpalatable to a proud nation. Just because his bourgeois supporters were frequently timid and selfish at heart, they liked to cover their love for safety and repose with some heroic mask; and there was no lack of turbulent Romantic elements clamouring for adventure. X. Doudan, a friend of the Orleans family, a thorough bourgeois himself, but a keen-sighted critic of his own class, said very aptly that there were, in every bourgeois heart, both a Don Quixote and a Sancho Panza.¹ The good householder, shopkeeper, paterfamilias, and National Guard wanted "to leave all the battlefields of Europe bestrewn with his corpse,"² but he wanted, at the same time, not to give up his cosy fireside, his felt slippers, and his daily *Moniteur*.

Louis-Philippe attempted with extraordinary shrewdness to satisfy these incompatible elements. To Sancho Panza he gave an economical government, exemption from military service for all who could afford to pay, a more or less "cordial" entente with England that spelt safety abroad, and a resolute policy of non-intervention. "Chacun chez soi, chacun pour soi"—everyone should stay at home and attend to his own affairs. We have heard that safe and sane programme not so very long ago. To Don Quixote he offered the colourful military drama of Algerian warfare, a campaign on a limited scale, prac-

¹ Daudet was to use the same idea very cleverly in a chapter of his *Tartarin*.

² "Joncher de son cadavre tous les champs de bataille de l'Europe."

tically free from international complications, but full of picturesque episodes, admirably calculated to inspire the pictures of Horace Vernet, to provide heroes for the rivals and successors of Scribe, and to give the young Orleans princes a sniff of gunpowder. But especially, Louis-Philippe gave to Quixotic France a thorough-going exploitation of the Napoleonic Legend. He who went down to history adorned with an umbrella, the symbol of foresight and thrift, affected to surround himself with the glorious veterans of the Empire. It was felt that no administration would be complete without "an illustrious sword," or at least, as the contemporaries irreverently put it, an illustrious scabbard. Marshal Soult was long Louis-Philippe's nominal Premier, and he called to power even Maret, Duke of Bassano, of whom Talleyrand had said: "I know of but one person more stupid than M. Maret: it is the Duke of Bassano." One of the first acts of his reign was to restore on top of the Vendôme Column the popular statue of the Little Corporal, in cocked hat and riding coat. The Triumphal Arch at the end of the Champs Elysées, the most impressive monument of its kind, was at last completed. And, as a climax, the Sailor Prince, Joinville, brought back from Saint Helena the remains of the Emperor.

Paris had never witnessed a more memorable pageant. Statues of victories lined the long route of the procession; amid the smoke of incense and the booming of guns, the monumental hearse, a veritable mausoleum on wheels, proceeded slowly from Courbevoie to the Invalides. The body was to find its final resting-place under the splendid gilded dome which Romain Rolland has likened to the helmet (the spiked helmet) of a Titan. The veterans, drunk with pride, had donned their moth-eaten, ill-fitting uniforms. That great day, December 15, 1840, "as brilliant as glory, as cold as the tomb," prophesied by Victor Hugo, was a romantic and popular triumph. A nation with such memories to celebrate could afford to keep her sword sheathed, even though Europe should

ignore and slight her, as had recently been the case.¹ The "late unpleasantness" in the Near East was forgotten, the King was cheered as he had never been before, and no one seemed to remember that the Emperor's nephew was in prison.

¹ France, who had supported Mehemet Ali against the Sultan, found herself isolated in Europe, and had to abandon her Egyptian protégé.

Chapter IV

THE INCARNATION OF THE LEGEND: LOUIS-NAPOLEON

I

WE COME now to the enigmatic figure of Louis-Napoleon, the living embodiment of the Legend. It was long the fashion to consider him as a mere by-product of his uncle's popularity. The irony of fate had made him a prince and a fool; the prestige of his name, worshipped by the multitude, made him an Emperor. He was a fetish, "a hat without a man," said Lamartine.¹

The gross injustice of this opinion has long been apparent. Destiny was ironical indeed in shaping the course of Napoleon III: exile, adventurer, dreamer and autocrat, but with a subtler smile than Lamartine or Victor Hugo perceived. Between the weaknesses of the man and his ambition, the contrast is not so striking as between the Utopian generosity of his aims, and the reactionary dictatorship which was forced into his hands. He was in his heart the heir of the fictitious Napoleon created by the Saint Helena legend—the Cæsar of Democracy. They made him the heir of the true Napoleon, the dictator who, in the name of order, had repressed and all but destroyed the spirit of the Revolution.

He was by no means a passive instrument. It was he alone who turned sentimental Napoleonism into prac-

¹ The legendary "redingote grise et petit chapeau" had a great place in popular imagination: it was a disappointment in 1815, when Napoleon appeared on the Champ de Mars without the "petit chapeau." The "petit chapeau" was a greater vote-winner in 1848 than all the personal achievements of Louis-Napoleon.

tical Bonapartism. He alone had faith in the star of his race: all his kin frowned or jeered at his attempts. Whilst the Emperor's brothers were standing idle—secretly negotiating their reconciliation with Louis-Philippe—he not only made use of the Legend, but contributed actively to it. His *Napoleonic Ideas* (1839) would deserve attention, apart from the name of the author: for the policy of Saint Helena is presented therein with no lack of clearness and vigour. At home Louis-Philippe represented but an oligarchy of wealthy taxpayers. *Let the people rule!* says Napoleon: let them elect a strong executive, the representative of the whole nation, and not of a caste. It is the doctrine of Cæsarean democracy. Abroad, Metternich and the disciples of Talleyrand had no ideal except preserving their artificial, their ever precarious balance of power among the different dynasties. Once more the Emperor, through his nephew, proclaims: "*Let the people rule!*" Let them form themselves freely into large cohesive national groups: it is the principle of nationalities, which we have rebaptized "principle of self-determination." Add to this Liberalism the promise of prosperity through public works boldly conceived on a national scale,¹ the programme is definite, and the generous simplicity of its outlines has an undeniable appeal. No wonder if to many well-meaning souls the squabbles of Louis-Philippe's politicians for jobs and portfolios seemed intolerably mean in comparison.

Louis-Napoleon's first attempt, at Strasbourg, in 1836, was a reckless gamble, as all such *coups* are bound to be. But it had been carefully prepared, and the first few moves in the desperate game went according to plans. The news was sent to Louis-Philippe by means of the semaphoric "telegraph" of Chappe—gaunt arms waving wildly from hilltop to hilltop. And, as if by the whim of an unscrupulous and too clever novelist, transmission was interrupted by the fog before the fate of Louis-Napoleon was decided. We may imagine the

¹ *L'Extinction du Paupérisme.*

reflections of the ageing King, tossed by so many storms, as he saw visions of Varennes, Fontainebleau, Ghent, Rochefort, Cherbourg, the fate of all his predecessors, prophetic of his own. At last an express brought post-haste the reassuring end of the story: the *coup* was a complete fiasco, and the prince was a prisoner. He was shipped to America, with a modest viaticum; and the Orleans breathed again. But in 1840 the irrepressible conspirator appeared once more on French territory. This time his failure was immediate and lamentable. The spot he had selected, Boulogne, should have been auspicious. It was there that the Legion of Honour was first distributed; and the adventurers could have used as a beacon the column erected by Napoleon to his Grand Army. In presence of such souvenirs, the Pretender looked ridiculous enough in his imperial disguise, and with the tame eagle he had taken with him.¹ This time the culprit could not be dismissed with a mere spanking. He was brought before the House of Peers. He was ably defended by Berryer, and he himself presented his cause in simple, striking words: he had not studied in vain the rhetoric of the Proclamations. The official world might refuse to take notice, but the masses had heard.

Louis-Napoleon's hopes might seem the blind obstinacy of a monomaniac; yet through his pamphlets, through numerous letters and articles, through his political ventures, he made France realize that Bonapartism had now a head. It is impossible to estimate the direct success of his propaganda. Emissaries like Fialin, the future Duke of Persigny, would approach secretly men in high places whose fortunes were of Bonapartist origin. In some cases the agents of the Prince may have stirred genuine sentiments; in other cases, they roused interest

¹ According to the version circulated by his enemies, and repeated a generation later by Gambetta, the bird was to hover above Napoleon's head, attracted by a piece of bacon concealed in the historical hat. The bacon has always been indignantly denied by the Bonapartists, and the imperial eagle may have been a vulgar vulture, the queer pet of a secondary character in the adventure.

at least, and made the persons concerned wonder whether, after all, "there might not be something in it." Newspapers were subsidized. The Prince himself had little money, and could not extract any from his illustrious relatives. But his absolute faith in his cause was contagious, and he found a few generous friends. It is obvious that sentimental Napoleonism was immensely richer and more widely diffused than mere Bonapartism; yet the systematic Bonapartist propaganda should not be neglected as an element in the spread of the Legend.

The 15th of December, 1840, had been a climax: nothing more could be extracted from Napoleonism for the benefit of the House of Orleans. A few years later the crafty old King who had tried to amuse France with an empty show heard the verdict: "*La France s'ennuie*" (France is bored). A mere incident caused him to slip from the throne, with less dignity than Charles X in 1830.

On the 10th of December, 1848, Louis-Napoleon, burdened with a record of debt and failure, unimpressive in appearance, with his small stature, his indefinite foreign accent, and his lack-lustre gaze, held in slight esteem by all the political wiseacres who approached him, was triumphantly elected to the Presidency of the Republic. He received over five million votes, against General Cavaignac, the actual "saviour of society," against Raspail and Ledru-Rollin, the champions of radical democracy, against Lamartine, the great poet, once the idol of the new regime. The fairness of the test cannot be questioned; if any official pressure was brought to bear it was in favour of Cavaignac, who was Chief Executive. The amazing completeness of the triumph, coupled with the candidate's apparent insignificance, seemed to measure accurately the magic of his name. The Legend, which had lost much of its glamour among the educated after the grand finale of December 15, 1840, had slowly permeated the masses of the people; and whilst the Parisian leaders had almost forgotten that they had once toyed

with Bonapartism, they were astounded at the discovery that France had become overwhelmingly Bonapartist.

However, we should not take it for granted that the five million votes received by Louis-Napoleon fairly gauged the strength of Bonapartist sentiment. The question is not so simple. A victory may be due less to the strength of the conqueror than to the weakness of the conquered. That there was a vast amount of Napoleonism diffused throughout France is undeniable: that it was intense and definite enough to carry any Bonaparte to victory against strong rivals is much more doubtful. The truth of the matter may be that, since the Revolution of February 1848, all other possibilities had been tried, and all had failed. The fall of Louis-Philippe was too recent, and had been too undignified, for the Royalists to have a chance under their own name: furthermore, they were divided into bitterly hostile camps, the Legitimists and the Orleanists. So they thought it clever to vote for Louis-Napoleon, just because they had no faith either in his cause or in him: he would only pave the way for a genuine Restoration. They repeated the mistake of Machiavellian old Louis-Philippe, and tried to make a catspaw out of Bonapartism. Lamartine had governed with a creditable combination of idealism and prudence; but his Provisional Government, unable to cope with the insurrection of June, had been swept away as ineffectual. That socialistic upheaval had thoroughly frightened and incensed the vast rural majority, as well as the bourgeoisie: Ledru-Rollin and Raspail were tainted with radicalism. Cavaignac had stamped out the attempted revolution, but he was combated by the Conservatives because he was a Republican, and might have made the Republic permanent, whilst he was hated by the Democrats for the ruthlessness he had shown in the repression—anything rather than “the Butcher of June”! Louis-Napoleon alone was untried. His name was popular. He was thought to be personally too weak to be dangerous. He was a

last resort and a provisional solution. The magic of the Legend played a decisive part in his election: yet it would have been impotent but for a combination of circumstances.

We are not attempting to rewrite history: the facts are irrevocable. We are only attempting to analyse and to measure the factors that brought about the known result. Had Louis-Napoleon lacked his unconquerable, fatalistic pertinacity; had Lamartine shown a little more timely energy, or Cavaignac more statesmanlike generosity; had not Thiers and his friends bartered away their future for the sake of immediate participation to power, and committed political suicide by endorsing the Bonapartist candidate, it seems infinitely probable that the result would have been different. But when the result was known, the many obscure and negative causes were naturally forgotten. The one obvious explanation was accepted as all-sufficient, and the impression was created—an impression which has not yet been fully destroyed—that the election of December 10th was the consecration, by popular vote, of the Napoleonic tradition.

Then the unexpected happened, to the confusion of the Machiavellians, led by Thiers and Montalembert. The Prince-President, who was supposed to reveal his incapacity and exhaust his borrowed prestige, proved himself to be the man of the hour. In his dull, awkward, silent way, he strengthened his position. The dominant feeling in the country at the time was the dread of Socialism. What France wanted was a Super-Policeman. But if social defence, repression, and even reaction, were desired, it was also the will of the country that reaction should not benefit exclusively a narrow class—the bourgeoisie which had been overthrown with Louis-Philippe. It was to be “reactionary democracy,” a curious, a paradoxical mixture. And it was exactly that mixture that Louis-Napoleon had to offer. For he was heir to the double Bonapartist tradition, the one which had its roots in facts—a Napoleon is a national gendarme, the one which

had been cultivated in Saint Helena : a Napoleon is the representative of the whole people, the crowned leader of Democracy.

II

On the 10th of December, 1848, "the Empire was made," although Louis-Napoleon waited three more years before assuming dictatorial powers (December 2, 1851) and finally the Crown (December 2, 1852).¹ He was amply justified in assuming that France demanded Bonapartism : did he not poll, with that name as the sole issue, five million votes in 1848, more than seven in 1851, nearly eight in 1852 ? So the Legend was cultivated with a thoroughness more persistent than that of Louis-Philippe. Out of genuine devotion for the founder of the dynasty, and out of respect for the manifest will of the people, Louis-Napoleon attempted to bridge the gap between 1815 and 1848, and to identify the two regimes. The last veterans of the Grand Army received more medals and more pensions. The legacies of Napoleon's will were settled at last. The new Emperor assumed the name of Napoleon III, thus recognizing the brief nominal rule of Napoleon II in 1815. The Court of the Elysée, and later of the Tuileries, was filled with families which had achieved prominence under the First Empire : the Murat, the Bacchiocchi, the Montholon. An authentic son of the great Emperor, Count Walewski, played an honourable subordinate part in politics. Louis-Napoleon was fortunate in having by his side an exalted survivor of the epic past, Jerome, the youngest of Napoleon's brothers, whilom King of Westphalia. That amiable *viveur*, who had rather amused than scandalized his German subjects, became a living relic ; he was made Governor of the Invalides, a Marshal of France, President

¹ Thiers's oft-quoted words, "L'Empire est fait," were uttered in January 1851. A curious instance, not of foresight, but of political blindness : the Second Empire had been prepared in 1840—by Thiers, and "made" in 1848—by Thiers. Thiers's prophetic power may also be tested by his opposition to railways.

of the Senate. But all the dignities heaped upon him could not give him, even in old age, an ounce of seriousness. This pious revival of the First Empire was carried into the details of Court etiquette; high-sounding functions were restored which had been allowed to lapse under the thrifty bourgeois rule of Louis-Philippe. And, of course, the army was cherished, expanded, dressed up, flattered in every way. Had it not been, in December 1851, the *ultima ratio* of the regime? Was it not the priesthood of the God of War, whose modern name is Napoleon?

All this was natural enough. What is the use of having a Bonaparte if he does not dress, speak, and act like one? Napoleon III would have disappointed France if he had not walked in his uncle's footsteps. The Second Empire was not a mere circus parade, as Victor Hugo loved to call it—a band of mountebanks coining money out of the Great Napoleonic Show. It cannot fairly be described as a cheap caricature, for the “splendours” of the New Regime were hardly more tawdry than those of the old. But it was undeniably a pastiche, and a pastiche of the most questionable aspects of its model. The Second Empire thus ran the Legend to death—to one of its periodical deaths. It was at the same time so obviously meretricious, and so faithful to its original, that it brought out the histrionic element in Napoleon I also: the Cæsar of bronze was probably plaster after all. This sentiment was manifested at the time of the centennial celebrations in 1869: never had Venetian and Japanese lanterns, bunting, fireworks and official oratory been more imperially provided, but the elaborate character of the official festival made popular indifference more evident. As a show, the Empire was played out.

III

The downfall of the regime, on the 4th of September, 1870, ruined political Bonapartism and seemed to dispose of Napoleonism as well. Yet the inexhaustible

Legend was to yield another aftermath. The two Emperors did not long remain linked together in popular execration. Napoleon III had become the scapegoat, carrying away the sins of a whole generation. Unable to defend him, his former supporters could claim that it was the uncle they had worshipped all the time, whilst they had been betrayed by the nephew. Even the radicals had used the same antithesis with good effect. When in their hatred of "Badinguet" and "Soulouque,"¹ they dubbed him "Napoleon the Little," they exalted, by implication, Napoleon the Great. If it was possible to salvage the Legend out of the wreck of 1870, it was partly thanks to the impassioned pamphlets and lyrical satires of Victor Hugo two decades before. The Second Empire became a foil for the First: the sun of Austerlitz shone more dazzlingly after the mire of Sedan. Even the undeniable material prosperity of the Second Empire redounded not to its own glory, but to that of its prototype. There must have been unique power in the genius of Napoleon I, since even a wretched parody of his reign could give France twenty years of internal order and a vast increment of wealth. This rough-and-ready division—all praises for the first Bonaparte, nought but opprobrium for the second—made possible a last flare of Napoleonism. It reached the height of its brilliancy about 1900, and is not quite extinguished. But it has not affected practical politics. Neither Plonplon² nor his son Victor have been factors to reckon with, and the masses of the people seem cured once for all of their Napoleonitis. This last development of the Legend belongs entirely to the realm of literature, and will be examined in its proper place.

¹ Two nicknames of Louis-Napoleon: the first said to be the name of the workman whom he impersonated when escaping from his prison of Ham (but that explanation has been challenged); the other, a potentate of Hayti, a very convenient living caricature.

² Prince Napoleon, son of King Jerome. According to the Constitution of the Empire, he was next-of-kin to the direct line of Napoleon III. But the Prince Imperial, disregarding the letter of the law, transmitted his claims to the French throne directly to Prince Napoleon's son, Prince Victor Napoleon: hence a schism among Bonapartists.

Contempt for Napoleon III has thus become an ingredient in our admiration for his great model. Even a dispassionate scholar like H. A. L. Fisher ends his *Bonapartism* on such a note: "for," he says, "although the French, in speaking of the Bonapartes, may remember the glories of Lodi and Marengo, they do not forget the disaster of Sedan, the shame of Metz, or the loss of Alsace-Lorraine"; and the most lyrical of Napoleon's recent eulogists, the art critic Elie Faure, rants as violently as Victor Hugo in his satire of the second Emperor.

It was difficult for men of the last generation to be impartial: the wounds of France were still bleeding. The enemies of Badinguet, with Thiers, Gambetta, Ferry, were in control; Victor Hugo had become more than the epitome of a glorious epoch in literature: he was the pontiff of Democracy and Free Thought, and we were taught the wild hyperboles of his *Châtiments* as though they were sober facts. We were not encouraged to wonder how our fathers could have been so craven as to support for eighteen years a regime so grotesque and so corrupt. That feeling has not disappeared. When Anatole France, in one of the delightful conversations in *Le Lys Rouge*, introduced a mild apology for the Man of December and Sedan, even a hint that he might be superior in some respects to Napoleon I, we smiled understandingly—we knew how to discount Anatole's whimsical fondness for the most outrageous paradoxes. It came as a veritable shock to the present writer, as late as 1905, when he picked up in a Paris bookstall a little volume entitled *Un Grand Méconnu*, and found its cover adorned with a photograph of Badinguet. H. G. Wells is at the very antipodes in literature from Anatole France, although both are professed Radicals. He, too, expressed in his *Outline of History* a cautious word of appreciation for Napoleon III; but one of his friendly advisers must needs add a note, protesting against such *Umwertung der Werte*.

We called this little book *Reflections* as a fair warning

to the reader that our purpose was not to be respectable, but to be sincere. So we may confess that, whilst we are frequently repelled by the martinet efficiency of Napoleon the Great, we are strangely attracted by the hazy, kindly, pathetic soul of Napoleon the Little. Such a feeling has, naturally, nothing to do with Bonapartism. We were brought up in the most orthodox Republican tradition, worshipping a grandfather who had been "a man of 'forty-eight," and learning our letters in the books of Victor Hugo. We hardly hope that our readers will follow us in our evolution; but, to ward off the accusation of wilful paradox, we should like to state through what steps we came to our present opinion.

It was probably Haussmann who led us to Napoleon III. The ruthless transformation of Paris by the autocratic prefect is open to innumerable criticisms. The straight lines that he slashed across the capital may be excellent for a cavalry charge or a volley of musketry—there was a strategic purpose in many of these "improvements"—but they do not satisfy the eyes of etchers in the same way as the twisting, swelling, contracting course of dear old Rue Mouffetard or Rue Montorgueil. Bulging façades, leprous walls, oozy blind alleys, will ever appeal more exquisitely to poetic souls than a magnified "Main Street" like Boulevard Sebastopol. No doubt Haussmann wrought irremediable havoc, and left a trail of *banalité* through the fairest city in the world. Still, when all this is admitted, there remains in the work of that period a breadth and daring of conception which command our respect. These men knew what they wanted, and what they wanted was to transform an ancient city so as to meet the sudden imperious demands of the industrial age. You can feel that instead of drifting, puzzled, reluctant, and feebly contemptuous, they understood, and they led. The new boulevards, the Gare du Nord, the Opera, revealed to us the spirit of the Second Empire: a spirit of industrialism purged from narrowness through a sense of national and social responsibility. It was free from the timidity which beset

the era of Louis-Philippe, and it escaped also the brutal anarchism which seared its mark on the face of British and American cities, and which we are so painfully attempting to exorcize at present. Once more, we are not blind to the commercial character of many details, as well as to the lack of subtlety in the whole plan. But, compared with the achievements of other modern regimes, those of Napoleon III are remarkable for their quality as well as for their mass. In architecture the Restoration and the July Monarchy are non-existent, and the only buildings planned by the First Empire were correct reproductions of Roman models. There is, on the other hand, a Second Empire Style, a modernized Italianate, of which the Grand Opera is the best known example. The Third Republic has already lasted more than twice as long as its immediate predecessor, yet it has modestly, very slowly, continued the work of Haussmann, without originating a single idea, so that the French, the initiators of modern city planning, are now far behind the English and the Germans.

Then it happened that we grew interested in the religious history of modern France. We were amazed to discover that religious problems were discussed, in that "frivolous" period, with an earnestness which to-day is almost entirely lacking. Theological controversies filled the air; a lesson from the Professor of Hebrew at the Collège de France was a national event, and his *Life of Jesus* became at once a best seller. "Imperial corruption" was shocked by *Madame Bovary* and *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and its "wickedness" expressed itself in the restrained wit of Meilhac and Halévy. We discovered also that the whole of spiritual France was not in exile with Victor Hugo and Edgar Quinet; that such men as About, Augier, Mérimée, Sainte-Beuve, were on excellent terms with the Tyranny; that Alfred de Vigny, noblest of philosophical poets, apostle of gentle and active stoicism, would have liked to be preceptor of the Prince Imperial; that Taine and Renan, princes of their generation, had accepted official positions, and that they, George

Sand, and even P. J. Proudhon, had friendly intercourse with the first Prince of the blood.

Napoleon III was the last person whom we were seeking in the Second Empire; but in all memoirs and letters we found casual references to the central figure of the regime, and they were singularly unanimous. Whilst no man with a spark of independence had ever loved Napoleon I, men with the strongest prejudices against his government fell under the quiet charm of Napoleon III—sceptics like Mérimée, scholars with liberal convictions like Victor Duruy and Maury, republicans like Emile Ollivier. He was not a marble saint. An adventurer from early youth, he remained secretive and disconcerting on the throne, but he never was guilty of a plot so base as was the trapping of the Spanish princes in 1808. He was no Galahad, but his amours were noble in comparison with the cynical caprices of the first Emperor. With all his frailties, he was kind. His was not the easy kindness of a sovereign with his immediate favourites—a mere incapacity to say “No.” Nor was it the shrewd kindness of the efficient ruler who invests in popularity. It was the deep-seated, hard-working, obstinate kindness of a prince who was at heart “a man of forty-eight,” a democrat, a humanitarian, a Saint Simonian socialist.

But, it may be said, even if we accepted your paradoxical portrait of the second Emperor as a Pierre Leroux in Napoleonic garb, it might elicit sympathy for the man, it would not save the reputation of the sovereign. Rulers are not expected to be idealists: their business is to govern living men, not to dream of Utopia. All that we need to know is that the Empire ended in abject failure: and by that test the Emperor is judged.

We accept the test, but we want to apply it impartially to both Napoleons. What are the duties of a Government? To make the country safe and respected among nations; to preserve order without crushing freedom; and to foster prosperity. On those three counts, how stand the records of uncle and nephew?

IV

On the first count—the international position of France—the prestige of Napoleon I is so immeasurably greater than that of his successor that any comparison may seem painfully futile. The “glory” of a nation is usually gauged in terms of military power, and Napoleon I was, we are weary of repeating it, the very Genius of War. When Napoleon III, who had received honourable training in the Swiss Militia, attempted to imitate the great conqueror, the result was ludicrous, and, at the end, disastrous. In his two great victories of Magenta and Solferino, he did not know where the enemies were; and the opposition chuckled over the story (*se non e vero . . .*) that when an aide came shouting, “Sire, what a glorious victory!” he replied, “A victory is it? I am so glad: I was going to order the retreat.” In 1870 he assumed command only to surrender. All this is roughly true. But if we keep Sedan for ever before our eyes, we should not forget that three times in three years, after Moscow, after Leipzig, after Waterloo, the Grand Army became an uncontrollable mob. It seems less disgraceful to go down under the blows of England and Prussia combined, with Austria and Russia in reserve, as in 1815, than to be routed by Germany alone, as in 1870. But that is a delusion: the army that the French had to face in 1870 was a much more formidable machine than those of the coalition in 1815. We are not suggesting for a moment that Napoleon III was a great general: but from him that hath not we should not take away even that which he hath; we should be fair even to mediocrities, and critical even with geniuses. To oppose, as H. A. L. Fisher does, the glory of Lodi to the shame of Sedan, is not much more equitable than it would be to contrast the rout of Waterloo with the triumph of Solferino.¹

¹ In our appreciation of a general, two elements have to be taken into account beside his personality: his own army, his enemies. If Napoleon III beat the Austrians in Italy because they were not first-class fighters, does not that factor count also in the campaign of 1799-97?

War, however, is not an end in itself: its aim is to defend the integrity of the national territory. How have the two Emperors succeeded in this respect? Both very ill, but Napoleon I by far the worse. Napoleon III left Continental France almost as large as he had found it: the annexation of Nice and Savoy nearly balanced in area, if not in wealth and population, the loss of Alsace-Lorraine. Napoleon I gambled away not only his own precarious conquests and the shaky thrones upon which he had seated his tribe, but vast regions of commanding economic importance, Belgium and the Rhine provinces, which had been secured at Basel in 1795, and which, in a few years, had become surprisingly French. No doubt the French people mourned over the separation from Metz and Strasbourg as they had not mourned when Cologne or Coblenz slipped away from them: Metz had been French for three hundred years, Strasbourg for nearly two hundred, the Rhineland for only twenty. But if Alsace was not annexed by Prussia in 1815, it was not because Napoleon I had been able to protect her: France was more completely prostrated then than she was to be in 1870. Compare the morrow of Waterloo with the morrow of Sedan, and you will readily see which of the two Bonapartes left France more exhausted and more utterly broken in spirit. On the seas the flag of Napoleon I practically disappeared, and the last colonies fell into English hands. Napoleon III, accepting steam navigation and iron protection with far-sighted readiness, made the French Navy again a formidable rival of the larger but more conservative British fleet. In Cochin-China, in Senegal, as well as in Algeria, the rudiments of a new overseas Empire were developed. If war is not to be "art for art's sake," success is not to be measured by transient victories. The true conqueror is not one who grabs and drops half a continent, but one who wins *and holds* were it but a few villages. Napoleon I has

And the army that Carnot prepared for Napoleon I was vastly superior in youthfulness, enthusiasm, and discipline to the army that the Algerian razzias of Louis-Philippe had prepared for Napoleon III.

added nothing permanently to France, and lost much. Napoleon III, at any rate, has gained something.

At home both Bonapartes ensured material order: it was their chief mission. The second fulfilled it even more efficiently than the first: thanks to more peaceful conditions, there was no need for "infernal columns." To preserve order, when a regime is endorsed, or at least accepted, by the bulk of public opinion, and when it has a large army at its command, is not a difficult task. What requires strength and skill is to preserve both order and liberty. Here, again, neither Emperor was wholly successful. We have heard a great deal about the high-handed methods of the last Bonaparte. All the power of the administration was at the service of the "official candidates." The Imperial Government was familiar with those thoroughly American and democratic institutions, the Pork Barrel and the Spoils System. Authors could be condemned, by the regular courts, to a fine of a few francs; newspapers had to insert *communiqués*; and persecution could be so ruthless as to force Louis Veuillot to change the name of his paper from *L'Univers* to *Le Monde*. We who have gone through the war and post-war periods of inspired propaganda, censorship, and abridgment of free speech, cannot but feel that Badinguet's tyranny was of the mildest description. Have we not seen M. Clemenceau's paper change ominously from *L'Homme Libre* to *L'Homme Enchaîné*? In the worst moments of the Second Empire the Press was annoyed, hampered, but never actually stifled. Allusion had to take the place of direct vituperation: "Tiberius" and "Soulouque" became familiar characters, and the journalists had the double pleasure of expressing their opinion whilst teasing or hoodwinking the censor.¹ After 1860 a much greater amount of freedom was allowed; in 1869 the Press had full licence, and abused it: a Rochefort could every week, in his flippantly clever little *Lanterne*,

¹ The same method had to be used, for the same reasons, in 1917, 1918, 1919; the Socialist daily *L'Humanité* inserted clever articles in which attacks against the tyranny of "Lenin," were universally understood to be levelled at M. Clemenceau.

deride and revile the head of the State in terms so scurrilous that they would not be borne for a moment in liberal America. On the whole, except for a few months in 1852, the regime of the Empire was not fundamentally different from the one that France enjoys, or tolerates, at the present day.

Now compare these conditions, unsatisfactory as we frankly admit they were, with those that prevailed under the First Empire. From 1852 to 1870 the Government used its influence in elections : but there were elections, with manhood suffrage, and by direct secret ballot. From 1800 to 1814 there were no genuine elections whatever. Under Napoleon I there was no free Press at all : a paper was considered absolutely as an *instrumentum regni*. From 1807 to 1813 no voice was heard in the political assemblies except as the trembling echo of the Master's. The dictatorship of Napoleon I lasted from his accession to his downfall, and grew heavier from year to year : the dictatorship of Napoleon III lasted but a few months in 1852. It was soon replaced by a regime insufficiently liberal, no doubt, but by no means a pure autocracy ; and the sphere of liberty was steadily enlarged until, after the plebiscite of 1870, France was but little behind constitutional England.

The third task of a Government is the promotion of material welfare. Judged by this test, the Second Empire was much more brilliantly successful than the First. Circumstances were undoubtedly more favourable : Louis-Napoleon came after a whole generation of peace, Napoleon I after ten years of revolution and war. But some of the differences were due to the sovereigns themselves. Napoleon I was responsible, to a very large extent, for the constant fighting and for the Continental Blockade which hampered French prosperity. Napoleon III, on the other hand, should receive credit for the vast expansion of industrialism, which he had foreseen when he was still in exile, and which he encouraged by a determined policy of great public works and organized credit. As an examiner for the Military School of Saint Cyr, Taine

had to travel extensively through the provinces, and although he was no blind admirer of the regime, he could not fail to note the evidences of universal prosperity. He expressed in his private diary his opinion that "the Emperor (Napoleon III) understood his times better than any one."

The actual superiority of the Second Empire over the First is marked most clearly perhaps by the fact that it enlisted much more unanimous and more lasting support. With all the methods of intimidation and coercion that we have mentioned, Napoleon I was not endorsed by more than three and a half million votes. Louis-Napoleon, on a smaller territory and with more reliable methods, scored nearly eight million votes in 1852. The last plebiscite of the First Empire, in 1815, gave only 1,300,000 affirmatives—a faint approval which was a clear manifestation of universal weariness. The last plebiscite of Napoleon III, in 1870, after twenty-one years of rule, eighteen years on the throne, gave him the same imposing figure as a whole generation before—seven millions.

V

By all material tests, therefore—defence of the national soil, order, liberty, prosperity, popular support—the Second Empire has by far the better record. When it comes to a comparison between the personalities of the two sovereigns, we confess that it is useless to run against popular prejudice. Napoleon I has prestige, Napoleon III has none. But "prestige" is a vague and dangerous thing, which has unfortunately no inevitable connection with merit. If the figure of the first Napoleon is fascinating, so is that of the most illustrious of vampires, Cleopatra. Marie-Antoinette will always arouse more romantic interest than Turgot, Carnot, Condorcet, or Lavoisier. "The brave and the fair" draw more homages than the wise. A bold soldier of fortune, a lovely queen in distress: our hearts go to them, be they right or

wrong. And this is as it should be—in the grand old realm of romance.

Unfortunately we are at present attempting to be sober, not without a qualm. The success of Napoleon I has been enormous and prolonged, but it is not rooted in the best there is in our nature. What strikes us at present is not the brilliancy of the man and of his regime, but the soullessness of both. In all things except his personal ambition, Napoleon was narrowly conservative and even reactionary. No "hero" could be so completely unresponsive to the heroic. This demi-god had for the first article of his creed: "I believe in meanness." So all the generous attempts of the Revolution were by him mercilessly sacrificed. Nothing would stand with him unless it had the sanction of "experience," which meant the cheerful acceptance of selfish men. So negro emancipation was cancelled, popular education neglected, religious freedom set back, representative government discouraged. He could not look forward: he, who had received a scientific education, and had a practical turn of mind, failed to understand the possibilities of the submarine and of the steamship that were offered him by Fulton. Even in his own domain of war and in his particular branch of it—artillery—he was neither an inventor nor tolerant of invention. The observation balloon, which had made its appearance at Fleurus in 1794, fell into disuse; and Napoleon's armies remained equipped with the flint locks of the Ancient Regime, and the ordnance of Gribeauval.

Napoleon III, on the contrary, was constantly straining into the future. Even in war equipment he was an innovator. He personally conceived the idea of the ironclad: there were floating armoured batteries at the siege of Sebastopol, years before the historic duel of the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac*. France was the first nation to have a seaworthy vessel, fully protected and yet speedy for the time, Dupuy de Lôme's epoch-making frigate *La Gloire*. Napoleon III is one of the inventors of the machine gun, those *mitrailleuses* from which wonders

were expected—too soon—in 1870. Whilst Thiers jeered at railroads, Louis Napoleon used his first moments of power to promote them. Whilst England scoffed or demurred at the proposed Suez Canal, he gave de Lesseps his full support. Whilst the French bourgeoisie, with its petty notions, “*Chacun chez soi, chacun pour soi*,” was hankering after more rigid protection, he caused a free trade agreement to be signed with England. So far ahead was he of his habitual supporters that the arrangement had to be prepared in secret, and that the final vote had to be forced by using all the influence of the executive. Whilst the same bourgeoisie had constantly striven to keep the working men down, he expunged from the Civil Code the notorious article 1781, and inaugurated a policy of sympathetic tolerance towards the trade unions. Whilst the sole doctrine of Thiers and his ilk in international affairs had been “sacred egotism”—their ideal a united France lording it over disunited neighbours—he was guided by the democratic principle of self-determination. He encouraged the free formation of homogeneous nationalities: he helped Italy and Rumania; he would have liked to help Poland; he was not personally averse to the unity of Germany.¹ He thought of Europe, at least of Western Europe, as a political and economic unit. He was always attempting to convene European congresses, and he encouraged the most practical forms of international co-operation, such as the so-called “Latin Union” for the use of the same monetary system. In every respect we find him, not an imperial swashbuckler, not the safe and sane leader of bourgeois mediocrity, and not a *Real-Politiker* of the Bismarckian type, but a man of 1848 and a man of 1918,

¹ It was not the principle of nationalities that caused the downfall of Napoleon III: it was the refusal, under pressure of the various oppositions, to accept its legitimate consequences. When a French minister declared that Germany must always remain divided into three fragments, France became the obstacle that had to be conquered; and when Rouher declared that “Never!” would the Italians enter Rome, he lost the possibility of Italian support in the approaching struggle. These considerations are respectfully submitted to the neo-Metternich who are vetoing the return of Austria to its historical connection with the rest of Germany.

an "idealist" who wanted industrial democracy at home and, in Europe, the friendly collaboration of free nationalities.

Accept for a moment, as a working hypothesis, this conception of Napoleon III; and then look closely at the great portrait of him by Hippolyte Flandrin. Note the contrast between the heavy, thoughtful, gentle face and the military trappings which he was compelled to assume; the lines of age and care, and the stigmata of a hard, sensual, ill-disciplined life; but also the capacious forehead, the kindly and sorrowful mouth, half-veiled by the thick moustache; and the eyes, strange and deep, sphinx-like in their vague fixity, the eyes of one who was looking beyond his time, and even beyond ours. Perhaps then you may be less shocked by the paradoxical conclusion which was forced upon us by a close study of his reign. In the long line of sovereigns who ruled over France there were few who did so much, and there was none that meant so well.¹

¹ *First Postscript.*—NAPOLEON III AND WOODROW WILSON.—It might be interesting to establish a parallel between Napoleon III and another fallen idol, Woodrow Wilson. Both idealists to whom it was given, for a season, to guide the world. Both fond of playing a lone hand, and addicted to secretiveness. Both quietly obstinate, and oddly loyal—perhaps out of shyness—to unworthy lieutenants. Both plebiscitary democrats—for what was President Wilson's appeal for a "solemn referendum" against the constitutional organs of public opinion, but a return to Cæsarian Democracy, "Democracy incarnated in a Providential Man," as Napoleon III had put it? Both elected on the campaign cry of peace. The fateful words at Bordeaux in 1852, "*L'Empire, c'est la paix!*" find a curious echo in the slogan of 1916: "He kept us out of war!" Both forced into the uncongenial position of war-leaders. Both believers in the fundamental right of peoples to dispose of themselves. Both looking forward to a peaceful comity of nations. We do not doubt that the character of President Wilson was freer from flaws than that of Napoleon III. On the other hand, an imperial adventurer is a more picturesque figure than a college president. We leave the details of this parallel to be filled by some future Plutarch.

Second Postscript.—PHILIP GUEDALLA: *The Second Empire.*—This chapter was completed before we had the opportunity of reading P. Guedalla's *Second Empire*. Few books have ever given us keener pleasure, and the qualifications that came to our mind do not affect the solid worth of the work or its extraordinary charm. It may be perverse to complain, as the French put it, "that the bride is too fair": yet the coruscation of M. Guedalla's wit, kept up through four hundred pages without the relief of a single dull paragraph, grows a trifle fatiguing for the proverbially owlsh eyesight of a professor. Our

second criticism is that the title is obviously a misnomer. The subject is Louis-Napoleon, not The Second Empire. The book is a biographical romance based on historical facts—a much more fascinating kind of writing than political history, but hardly more closely related to history than the narrative of Lavoisier's death on the scaffold is to chemistry. In the interpretation of Louis-Napoleon's character, we may claim that we agree with Mr. Guedalla much more than he agrees with himself. His method of treatment implies the usual conception that the Second Empire was a prolonged Opera Buffa between a melodramatic prologue, the 2nd of December, and a tragic epilogue, Sedan. But the facts that he quotes, and the impressions that he frequently conveys, do not tally with these current prejudices. He gives us glimpses not only of a ruthlessness, pleasure-loving, erratic, incompetent adventurer, but also of the gentle imperial socialist that we have been attempting to define—a Utopian dreamer whose reign was marked by the most solid achievements.

BOOK III

THE NAPOLEON SAGA IN FRENCH
LITERATURE

Chapter I

NAPOLEON AND THE LITERATURE OF HIS TIME

I

LEGENDS SPRING from three sources. The most abundant—so abundant that the baser elements in it are infinitely diluted, and that the whole stream seems pure—is popular imagination. It appears capricious only because it is unconscious: but it follows well-defined laws, as surely as a river cuts its winding bed according to the slope and to the nature of the soil. First of all, it exaggerates: epic folk-lore and American humour are akin in their love for the enormous. It wants hecatombs and giants. In exaggerating, it simplifies. It has no use for delicate shades, complex problems, and subtle characters. Vast and confused events, which all the forces of a culture have been preparing for generations, become in the popular mind the work of a few men. The wreckage that rides the flood most arrogantly is supposed to be guiding it. Then subordinates are absorbed into the personalities of their leaders: and One at last stands out, the sole embodiment of a Cause, fated to aspire, to lead, and to fail. To fail: most popular myths are sombre, for we know too well that the present world is not Utopia. But in the very failure there was a glimpse of the promised heaven—a glimpse which will illumine mankind for many a year. Thus it was that the great convulsion which occurred between 1789 and 1815, impersonal and multitudinous, was transformed into the background for the life drama of a single man, Napoleon.

Another fountain of legend flows, less innocently,

from those who are personally interested in the creation of the myth. It takes the form of governmental advertisement or propaganda, "inspired news," "official history." In volume it is a mere trickle compared with the main source, popular imagination. But, mingling with it, it may deflect it, colour it, impose upon it an usurped name. We know what use Napoleon made of this form of influence when he was on the throne, and still more during his captivity, when all other means of action had been taken away from him. The Liberals under the Restoration, Louis-Philippe himself and his minister Thiers, Louis-Napoleon and the small knot of convinced Bonapartists, aided to swell the stream. A fabricated legend of that kind may have lasting influence. Of course, you cannot fool all the people all the time with the same story, but you can fool a good many people for a good long time. And if it is not unadulterated fooling, if the story is not radically at variance with the facts, if it is in agreement with the secret craving of the multitude, then it becomes so tangled up with the truth that the fabricators themselves come to believe in it. To borrow a well-worn metaphor, the story receives such a thick electro-plating of truth, that we forget the core was of baser metal.

The third source of legends is literature. It is not spontaneous, like the first, it is not deliberate and partisan, like the second. In certain cases, its results are impressive and enduring. We may have three or four versions of the same historical personage: the man as he was; the man as he sought to appear; the man magnified, distorted, or embellished, in the uneven mirror of popular imagination; finally, the man as portrayed by the poets. Take as instances King Arthur and Charlemagne: the one a shadowy, semi-fabulous figure, the other very real and massive. Both spent centuries in a sort of twilight realm, from which they emerged to be captured by literature and decked with fantastic garments. The new Arthur, the new Charlemagne, are quite different from the dim or rude heroes of history, and even of popular imagination. It is this new Charlemagne, the Crusader,

the Saint with his flowing beard, and his charmed life of two hundred years, that we find in the *Song of Roland*, and that Gaston Pâris studied in his *Histoire Poétique de Charlemagne*. Now, in precisely the same manner Napoleon had his "poetical history." He became the centre of a dramatic and epic cycle. Nineteenth-century poets did not make him two hundred years old, and did not give him the formal halo of a saint (for which, by the way, he was fully as well qualified as his great Frankish predecessor). Short of these extremes, which would have been absurd in our age, they went as far as they dared in their use of him for literary purposes. They turned him into a "Prometheus," a "Messiah," a demi-god, and even a full-size god: for did not Victor Hugo sing of "Napoléon, ce Dieu dont tu seras le prêtre" ? ¹

What is the importance of this third or fourth Napoleon ? From the literary point of view, it is considerable. He was a favourite theme. We cannot study French literature in the nineteenth century without taking his influence into account, any more than we can ignore the long shadows cast by Rousseau, Chateaubriand, and Lord Byron. From the political point of view, the answer must be more guarded.

Napoleonism did not originate with the poets: as a matter of fact, we shall see that they were among the last people to catch the contagion. The "literature" which confirmed the masses in their Napoleon-worship was mostly of the kind which critics would refuse to call "literature" at all. And the major prophets of the Legend, Béranger, Thiers, Victor Hugo, were all three surprised and chagrined when the Legend, following its natural course, became incarnated in a man, and helped to restore the Empire in favour of Louis-Napoleon.

History, written by bookmen and mostly for bookmen, is apt to accept the claims of bookmen at their face value. Monsieur Jourdain's dancing master was persuaded that dancing was the greatest of all arts, and Monsieur Josse,

¹ Cf. also, "Napoléon, la face de Dieu dans les ténèbres" (Léon Bloy); "Jésus et Lui" (Elie Faure).

the goldsmith, believed that trinkets were a cure-all for humans ills. A poet is convinced that poetry guides the world "*Vous êtes orfèvre, Monsieur Josse!*" It is not quite certain that Chateaubriand restored Christianity in 1802 and the Bourbons in 1814; that Lamartine overthrew the July Monarchy in February 1848; and that Victor Hugo's opposition prevented Napoleon III from establishing himself securely on the throne. Poets are to be heavily discounted, especially when they are talking about themselves.

But it would be futile to deny them all influence because they have claimed too much. Words are deeds—the written word as much as the spoken word. Even if we are inclined to minimize the importance of a book as an active factor, we must at least recognize its importance as a testimony. If Chateaubriand's *Spirit of Christianity* did not cause the Catholic revival, it proved, at any rate, that the Catholic revival was well under way. But such a book is not an objective witness: in defining vague aspirations, it transforms them. Chateaubriand was but the mouthpiece of multitudes, it is true, but innumerable individuals were to become, henceforth, attenuated replicas of Chateaubriand. Literature of a high order endures. It survives the occasion of its origin, it provides the people with a memory more definite than mere tradition—and even more mendacious. We think we remember what the poets have told us we should remember. In the twentieth century, our Napoleon is evidently not the Napoleon of personal experience. It is seldom—even with professional historians—the Napoleon of disinterested scholarship. It is not the Napoleon of spontaneous tradition, for tradition has been tampered with from the beginning. It is not purely the Napoleon of literature, for the Legend is much more universal than any of the books that relate it, and a man who has never read Las Cases, Thiers, or Masson may think he has a very definite conception of the Emperor. It is a Napoleon of tradition blending with literature, each reacting upon the other.

It is even in a higher degree the Napoleon of Art. The figure of the Corsican has remained vivid and popular through prints, pictures, statues, and monuments, even more than through histories, romances, or poems. There is no great saying of Napoleon himself that is so well-known as his little cocked hat, no book about him so familiar as his grey coat, the lock of hair athwart his forehead, his trick of slipping his fingers into his waistcoat. Brienne, Arcola, Egypt, the 18th of Brumaire, the Coronation, the Grand Army acclaiming its leader, Eylau, the King of Rome playing at his father's feet, the retreat from Moscow, the farewell to the Old Guard at Fontainebleau, Waterloo, the *Bellerophon*, Saint Helena—all these are visual rather than intellectual memories. Man had eyes long before he was capable of abstract thought, and even in our reading age the appeal of a picture is infinitely more general and more potent than that of a book. Napoleon's life is not a treatise, but a film. It was David, Gros, Proudhon, Géricault, Raffet, Charlet, Meissonnier, Detaille, Caran d'Ache, and their innumerable rivals and successors, who were the chief weavers of the Legend. The Empire remains heroic, because it was picturesque. If that brief adventure leaves in our minds an impression of solidity and majesty, it is because the Vendôme Column and the Triumphal Arch stand massive and eternal before our eyes. If our feet turn irresistibly towards his tomb in pilgrimage, if, under the lofty dome, we are struck with awe by the purple and golden light, subdued like a dirge, triumphant like all the trumpets of the Grand Army—it is not because we are in the presence of a demi-god, it is because a half-forgotten artist, Visconti, used with marvellous skill the grand architecture of Mansard.

Plastic art and literature are constantly assisting each other. A German ballad by Zedlitz inspired Raffet's best-known lithograph; and it was from Raffet that Gautier borrowed his *Veterans of the Old Guard* (*Les Vieux de la Vieille*), and Rostand his "growler" Flambeau in *L'Aiglon*. On the whole, it seems that the Napoleonic

Legend is plastic rather than literary, whilst the Carolingian and Arthurian legends are literary first of all. Yet it is on the literary rather than on the pictorial aspects of the Legend that we want to insist. The pictorial Legend is familiar to everybody and requires little discussion. It is potent just because it is simple, and speaks through transparent symbols. The literary Legend, on the other hand, is many-sided, and full of subtle conflicts.

II

The first contributor to Napoleonic literature was Napoleon himself. First in time, first in authority, first in the bulk of his writings, which neither Thiers nor Masson could rival; and it might be claimed also, first in talent. For although French was not his native language, although his training had been scientific and professional rather than humanistic, he acquired a truly imperial command of that difficult instrument. His early writings—letters, political pamphlets, draft of a romance—are vehement and turgid after the fashion of the time. As his star ascended, he spoke in more definite, more personal tones. There are found in his Proclamations, in his speeches, in his Bulletins, in his Memoirs the directness of the soldier and the majesty of the sovereign. These qualities are essentially classical. Napoleon, the champion of order, and even of enforced order, discipline, was at heart a classicist. We should add that he was a classicist by heritage too, a descendant of the Romans, a son of the Latin sea, if we believed in races. He certainly was a classicist by education: he grew up at a time when antiquity was more lovingly studied and more obediently revered than even in the days of Boileau. His language is full of classical reminiscences, like the style of architecture he favoured, and like the very regime he created: the Empire is an elaborate pastiche. Much of his eloquence, borrowed from the *Conciones Latinæ* of Estienne, leaves us frigid. But Napoleon, whose sole canon, in literature as well as in government, was efficiency, was bound to use a style that his contemporaries would

understand and appreciate. And at times the pastiche is so perfect that we find in the French Cæsar a modern rival rather than a mere imitator of the ancient orators.

There was withal a dash of Romanticism in him. With his touches of superstitious fatalism, with his love of adventure and his hankering for the gorgeous East, with his fondness for Ossian, he was indeed the contemporary of Chateaubriand; and it will be noted that, in spite of the most serious political disagreements, he retained his admiration for the Father of French Romanticism, who, more, grudgingly, returned the compliment. If Napoleon insisted upon discipline—the essence of Classicism—it was only for others. In his own case all rules were brushed aside, his Ego filled the world: he was Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Byron—only he was active whilst they dreamed, yawned, or blasphemed. Baron Seillière is correct, I believe, in his main contention that Imperialism and Romanticism are one. The boundless yearning of the poets is but the negative aspect of the Will to Power: it is Will to Power unappeased. And the Will to Power, which was to find its supreme literary expression in Nietzsche, had already found its most complete realization in Bonaparte.

So his pages, lucid and direct even in their occasional bombast, are strewn with fine oratorical effects, and with images of singular vividness and grandeur. Everyone remembers “the eagle flying from steeple to steeple until it reaches the towers of Notre Dame.” In conversation and in informal speeches he would drop into familiarity; the contrast between the vastness of the interests at stake and the conscious vulgarity of the expression anticipated some of the most striking effects of Victor Hugo. On the 1st of January, 1814, when the Empire was already tottering, he addressed the Legislative Body in terms which were unexpected and curiously effective. “Let’s wash our dirty linen among ourselves.” “What is a throne, after all? Four sticks of wood, a bit of velvet: all depends upon who sits on it.” Men may be great, and yet silent.

But what a unique opportunity, when a man of deeds happens also to be a master of words !

The wonder is that, with such a career, and with such gifts of expression, Napoleon should not rank among the very greatest historians and orators of his country, and even of the world. Yet the fact is incontrovertible : his forty volumes have failed to give him a prominent place in literary history. Even among Napoleonic writers he is by no means the favourite. You will find in every old-fashioned library some odd volumes of Thiers, perhaps also Ségur's *Russian Campaign*, Las Cases, Gourgaud ; in humbler homes, a cheap edition of Marco Saint-Hilaire or Dumas ; the modern public will buy Sloane, Rosebery, Vandal, Houssaye, Masson, and even the spurious memoirs of third-rate men who have lived near the hero. But his own writings do not occupy the central, the fundamental position that might be expected.¹

What is the reason for this lack of enthusiasm ? Readers harbour no prejudice against men of action who relate their own experiences. The *Anabasis* was hardly more romantic than Napoleon's expedition into Egypt, but Xenophon still charms us. Cæsar did not go through stranger adventures than Napoleon, neither had he a grander stage whereon to play his part : but his *Commentaries* have lost none of their severe beauty. Villehardouin was a minor personage in a Crusade that lost its way, and was turned into a looting enterprise in Imperialism : but his narrative is fascinating. Others could be named by the score : Joinville, the naïvely world-wise companion of the Holy King Louis IX ; Comynes, the Talleyrand of a sovereign far less crafty and less picturesque than Napoleon himself ; Paul de Gondi, that mitred busybody who set by the ears Court and capital, minister and Parliament, all for the sake of a cardinal's hat ; Saint-Simon, babbling, bounding, roaring, and foaming like a mountain torrent, wasting his passionate verve on mediocre rascals,

¹ A few years ago an Autobiography of Napoleon entitled, we believe, *The Corsican*, was published in English : it was entirely drawn from his memoirs, letters, and speeches. It did not become a best seller.

petty intrigues and minute points of etiquette : all these, wise or foolish, are alive, enlighten us, entertain us. Why is not Napoleon greater than they in literature, as he undoubtedly was in history ?

The reason is that the spiritual limitations of the man are too evident in his addresses or memoirs. He never wrote or said anything that did not consciously tend to his own aggrandizement. The bulky collection of his complete works belongs entirely to advertising literature. We do not reproach him for being an egotist. Most great writers are as self-centred as Dante, Hugo, or Bernard Shaw. But they manage none the less to give us a view or an echo of the world as reflected by their personality. Napoleon's personality was so absorbing that the world disappeared. For him, there were no ideals, no principles, and even no passions to serve, but Napoleon first, last, and all the time.

We might expect that such a revelation of the most fascinating character in history would be of commanding interest, and we are disappointed. Napoleon does not fully reveal himself in his writings. This is not due to any reticence or shame : from such faults he was absolutely free. But he could not confess himself like Rousseau. Rousseau, with all his insane pride, knew that there was a court of the spirit, before which he was responsible. Napoleon was his own law. The boundless egotist, who abolishes the moral world, is repaid in kind : he loses moral substance. A personality is defined through its contacts and conflicts : the man who cannot love, trust, and admire, the man who cannot respect honest dissent, may fill the world with tumult, but is shrivelled at heart, and such a man was Napoleon. Thiers on Napoleon is more vital, more dramatic than Napoleon writing about himself : because in Thiers's book we see the small, unlovable, but very active personality of the author asserting itself in very human fashion, grappling with something bigger than itself. Napoleon never grappled with anything bigger than himself : the Army, the Revolution, France, Europe, were his tools or his playthings. And that is why the notes

of the humblest grognard like Coignet appeal to us more than the memoirs of the Emperor.

The works of Napoleon do not belong to great literature, because they lack the disinterestedness without which no literature can be great. Dante, Saint-Simon, Rousseau, may be prejudiced, passionate, conceited, yet they believed in Truth, and yearned to tell posterity the truth there was in them. Napoleon never wrote without an immediate practical purpose. He never cared about what was right or what was true, but only about what was expedient. On assuming command in Italy, he appealed to the craving for loot; defeated in Russia, he closed a veiled confession of disaster with the comforting assurance that "His Majesty had never been in better health." An eighteenth-century Deist, he was ready to become a Mohammedan if he had remained in Egypt, and he signed a Concordat with the Pope when he returned to France. He scorns us too much ever to tell us what he really thinks: he lets us know what he wants us to believe that he thinks. So he constantly wears a mask; and although the mask has grown thin, it is still solid enough to check our sympathy.

The mask, we said, has grown thin, and we have discovered, in Napoleon's own works, that his personality is vastly less interesting than his rôle. This is why we are so much more interested in what he did than in what he thought or felt. His writings reveal him as a common man on a gigantic scale: there is no mystery about his soul, there is no generosity in his heart, there is no subtlety in his thought. The same elements eternally recur and grow wearisome: boundless egotism, coarse-grained efficiency. You may scan these forty volumes in vain for anything that comes measurably near the serene wisdom of Washington or the rough-hewn, heart-felt eloquence of Lincoln. "*Le vers se sent toujours des bassesses du cœur.*"

The career of Napoleon, viewed from the standpoint of the professional dramatist, is a masterpiece of stage-craft; the character of Napoleon, if it were the creation

of a fiction writer, would be pronounced shallow and uninteresting. In other terms, the melodrama *Napoleon*, produced with such dazzling success on the European stage between 1795 and 1815, is as thrilling in its incidents and as commonplace in its psychology as the standard Western films or the novels of Harold Bell Wright. But the public loves adventure, and is bored by analysis. So Wright sells by the train-load, and there is little likelihood that Napoleon's appeal will ever fail.

III

It was not Napoleon's fault if he was not the sole writer of note in his Empire, just as he was the sole military commander: he took care to weed out literary independence, just as he stifled strategic initiative. Chateaubriand and Madame de Staël had the same fate as Moreau and Lazare Carnot. When Augustus quelled the tumult of civil strife, the melodious voice of Vergil was heard: Napoleon silenced those who might have been his Vergils. We have seen that among all the liberties that he suppressed were those which are indispensable to literature. We remember that there was no freedom of the periodical press: all the papers were confiscated, except some thirteen or fourteen, which, under heavy bond, were licensed by the Government. A journalist who had attempted to tell the truth as he knew it would have forfeited his position, his liberty, and perhaps his life. No liberty for books: witness the fate of Madame de Staël's work *On Germany*, confiscated and destroyed by the police, after having been authorized by an imperial censor. No liberty on the stage. Brifaut had written a *Don Carlos* on the same subject as Schiller's: the Emperor was afraid lest the public should discover in that tragedy allusions to the Spanish imbroglio in which he was engaged at the time. The play was suppressed, and the author, with exemplary docility, transferred his characters to the safer precincts of ancient Nineveh, much to the advantage of his local colouring. No liberty of the

political tribune: the Legislative Body was an assembly of mutes, the Senate an impressive array of well-drilled choristers, and the Tribunat was suppressed. No liberty in the pulpit, no liberty in the professorial chair. No liberty in the private drawing-room: the police had ubiquitous ears. No liberty even in correspondence, for no seal was sacred for the agents of Fouché. We beg forgiveness for reiterating this eternal complaint, but it is the keynote of the Empire. "*Je dis toujours la même chose, parceque c'est toujours la même chose.*"

Under such a regime, it is natural enough that official French literature should have reached the extreme limits of inanity. Circumstances, it must be confessed, were not favourable: the obstinate fossils of pseudo-classicism were still cumbering the ground, the new era had not yet discovered an art of its own. Delille was the king of these Epigoni: no poet lived in such a dense cloud of incense as this virtuoso of descriptive verse. He never was so proud as when he had minutely painted a common object in all its details, without using a term that was not strictly "noble"; so that his lines were a concatenation of clever puzzles in the purest academic style. He was blind like Homer and like Milton, whom he translated: he had little else in common with them. Docile and mercenary, he praised Napoleon as he had praised the Bourbons.

Among the younger generation, the most successful was Fontanes: that lazy, amiable sceptic directed the thin stream of his talent with singular wisdom; it made him Grand Master of the University. The others, Baour-Lormian, Luce de Lancival, Chênedollé and *tutti quanti*, are the faintest shadows in a sort of misty twilight. They are not substantial enough to have faults. They may be credited with the strictly negative quality of good taste; they have at least a bowing acquaintance with the great classical models, of which they give blurred and attenuated copies; and there is a sort of feeble elegance in their treatment of trite or trifling themes. As a matter of fact, the dramatic triumphs of the time were won by old Corneille,

whose stiff and vigorous political tragedies found in Talma a gifted interpreter.

Napoleon was keen-minded enough to notice the lamentable mediocrity of literature under his reign. He tried his autocratic methods: he wanted to conscript and train literary men, as he conscripted and trained soldiers or officials. "Find me dramatists, find me poets!" he would say to Fontanes. "Offer prizes!" Thus he attempted to foster literature, after ruining the fundamental conditions of literature. Was it not Memmius who cautioned the workmen packing Greek masterpieces destined for Rome: "Handle them with care, for if you broke them, you would have to make them over again!" Napoleon and his crew of official writers did assay to "make them over again"—and the world does not even smile at the result.

Every writer, great or small, who had a soul to call his own, was silent or in exile. Ducis, Marie-Joseph Chénier, Volney, Népomucène Lemercier, Benjamin Constant, even young Charles Nodier, felt the invisible iron grip on their throats.¹ The age counted three great names: Joseph de Maistre, Madame de Staël, Chateaubriand. Because those leading minds were out of sympathy with the regime and with the master, Georg Brandes, in his masterly *Main Currents*, coined for the period the term *Emigranten Literatur*: all were spiritually in exile.

We do not mean that this verdict of literature should be accepted without discussion. We have no faith in the infallibility of writers. Joseph de Maistre was a foreigner; he never knew Napoleon at close range; he was, in religion and in politics, a thoroughgoing reactionary, the most consistent among the "Prophets of the Past"; finally, he was addicted to wilful paradox—four excellent reasons for challenging his testimony. Madame de Staël coquetted furiously with the First Consul, in the hope of governing France from her drawing-room. Napoleon

¹ Would the delicate and profound analysts Senancour and Joubert have written more abundantly if the Napoleonic blight had not secretly discouraged them?

felt like Mr. Balfour when too masterful a hand was proffered to him: "He would prefer having a career of his own"; and if there is one point upon which we find it easy to sympathize with Bonaparte, it is in his dread of that formidable blue stocking. Chateaubriand was a sublime *poseur*: his magnificent imagination could, without actually lying, exaggerate things that never happened, and perhaps we should not take his opinion of Napoleon much more seriously than his celebrated description of Niagara: "Eagles, drawn in by the vortex, wheel slowly down to the bottom of the chasm, and wolverines hang by their long flexible tails at the end of a bending bough, so as to snatch from the abyss the broken corpses of elks and bears."¹

On the other hand, it may be said that none of these three writers was originally biassed against Napoleon. Just because he was not a French royalist, Joseph de Maistre felt no superstitious reverence for the Bourbons. He was ready to hail in Napoleon the restorer of monarchial order and the Catholic Church. What made him irreconcilable was the brutal disregard for moral values displayed by the Emperor. "I am willing to give him all the titles you please," he said, "except that of *great*." Madame de Staël had tried hard—much too hard—to be Napoleon's friend. Chateaubriand had sincerely rallied to the new regime, and accepted from Bonaparte a minor diplomatic appointment. It is significant that all three, starting from widely different parts of the political horizon, and without any preconceived hostility, should have come to the same conclusion.

Perhaps the opinion of three writers would matter little if there had been others, of corresponding rank, to take Napoleon's part; but there was none. With his dazzling success, his personal fascination, the enormous resources at his command, he could not bribe or coerce any self-respecting writer to do him homage. The flatteries of a Brifaut only confirm the silence of a Ducis, or the active opposition of a Staël.

¹ *Atala*.

But cannot such a judgment recoil upon the very judges? If they failed to see greatness in him, was it because he was small, or because they were blind? We think of Mallarmé's famous sonnet, hard and cold and fraught with meaning like a black marble sphinx:—

Tel qu'en lui-même enfin l'éternité le change,
Le poète suscite, avec son glaive nu,
Son siècle épouvanté de n'avoir pas connu
Que la Mort lui parlait par cette voix étrange. . . .

Victor Hugo, with his own glory in mind, uses a striking simile: when you are in the heart of the mountains, you cannot judge of their respective height, a foot-hill may hide a peak from your view. Go down into the plains, miles and miles away, the proper perspective is restored, the true summits soar and stand in all their majesty.

This is true, no doubt, when there has been active and confused competition; time alone can sift the truly great from the merely successful, tear away the prestige of office, or wash away the stain of rebellion. Laureates, academicians, best-sellers will fade, whilst obscure Bohemians may rise into glory. It is even more true, when the excellence to be rewarded is of an unobtrusive type: there may be at work to-day a scientist, a poet, an apostle, whose messages will be cherished when presidents, generals, and millionaires have long been forgotten. But Napoleon did not belong to either of these classes. His career stood out boldly, unmistakably: it did not have to be "discovered," it had only to be appraised. We must not believe that it is in the very nature of glory to be posthumous. Men are willing, nay, they are eager, to worship a living hero. Voltaire, Goethe, Victor Hugo, among writers, enjoyed such an apotheosis in their own lifetime. Sovereigns have seldom failed to find poets, and genuine poets, to sing their praise. Augustus had Vergil, Elizabeth had Spenser, Louis XIV had a splendid choir of grave and sincere voices, majestically led by Bossuet. After Napoleon's day, Tennyson contributed in perfect faith to the legend of good Queen Victoria, and Whitman sang his heartrending dirge for Lincoln,

his captain. We may therefore take the silence or the hostility of the great writers of Napoleon's time as a verdict, unanimous and emphatic. They knew him better than we do, and their opinion carries weight.

On the other hand, Napoleon was surrounded by a group of scientists which can hardly be matched in its variety and brilliance. Lacépède, Lagrange, Laplace, Monge, Chaptal, Fourcroy, Berthollet, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, Cuvier—we are naming only a few leaders in a few branches—felt free to carry on their work, were encouraged by Bonaparte, and accepted from him high functions, large salaries, honorific rewards.¹ We do not believe for an instant that science dulls the conscience of its devotees. The striking contrast between the two groups of men, like the elect and the damned on the pediment of the Madeleine, must be explained in some other way. The fact that Napoleon himself was a scientist could not be without influence. Then he conceived of the State as a vast army. In an army, scientists may be of immediate practical use, poets can be turned only to the writing of propaganda—and the Emperor felt that he could manage that end of his business without their aid. The scientist who confines himself to his laboratory is, from the point of view of the powers that be, a safe man. The liberty he needs for his researches is no menace to the peace of the State. The results of his labour cannot as a rule reach the masses at all; they are not dangerous unless they are translated into a language “understood of the people,” i.e. until they become literature. Perhaps science fosters in her followers a spirit of fatalism which predisposes them to obedience; they accept a despot in the same way as they submit to a storm. Whatever its cause may be, the phenomenon offered by the reign of Napoleon is not unique: science is never averse to enlightened despotism. Renan even dreamed of a world ruled by the Academy of Sciences with a rod of iron—the most unlovely Utopia on record. The German scientists, who claimed to be the most thorough in the world, seemed to breathe without

¹ Lamarek, on the contrary, was treated with extraordinary rudeness.

difficulty under the Hohenzollern. The men who supported the autocracy of Diaz in Mexico called themselves, not inaptly, the Científicos.

Science teaches discipline, the elimination of self. Art is the exaltation of the individual. A world of Cuviers would offer no resistance to tyranny, a world of Chateaubriands would be a colourful anarchy. So we may safely conclude, with Monsieur de la Palisse, Joseph Prudhomme, Martin Tupper, and Walt Mason, that it takes all sorts of men to make a well-seasoned society.

Chapter II

NAPOLEON IN THE ROMANTIC ERA

I. ROMANTICISM NOT GUILTY.

I

AS A PHENOMENON in French literature, the Legend did not arise until after the Emperor's death. Before 1821 Bonaparte was the only great writer who had devoted his talent to the glorification of Napoleon. The vogue of Napoleonism reached its zenith between the years 1827 and 1840. The "Return of the Ashes," in December 1840, was its grand climax. Immediately afterwards the enthusiasm of the poets cooled off very noticeably. Now, any standard history of French literature will tell us that Romanticism, as a definite movement, scored its first victory with the *Méditations* of Lamartine, in 1820, and that, in March 1843, Victor Hugo's drama, *Les Burgraves*, met with an indifference which proved that the Romantic fever had passed. The coincidence is striking, and it could not fail to impress even the contemporaries. Romanticism and the Napoleonic Legend are so exactly parallel in point of time that it is difficult not to believe that they must be related.

In his ultra-Romantic *Confession of a Child of the Century*, Alfred de Musset diagnosed the spiritual agony of his generation as the aftermath of Napoleon's career. For twenty years the Corsican had led our fathers, breathless and joyous, to the conquest of the world. We have inherited at least the memory of their titanic energy, of their scorn for traditional bounds, of their faith in the star of our race. But he who had become

the centre of our lives has been laid low, and existence without him seems unprofitable and stale. Our yearning, our despair, are the "disease of the century." It devours us, and it ennobles us: self-satisfied classicism could never express nor even understand it. This thesis has remained a great favourite. We find it expressed, with scholarly reserve, by Georges Lote, in the *Romanische Forschungen*,¹ and, with greater charm and authority, by that belated Romanticist, Maurice Barrès.

On the other hand, might not Napoleon-worship be the result, instead of the cause, of Romanticism? There was in the twenties and thirties of the last century a splendid outburst of imagination, gorgeous and tragic, like a city aflame. If the shadow of Napoleon looms so vast on the lurid horizon, was it because of his own greatness, or because of the Romantic blaze? The Napoleonic Legend is an epic romance which was ready before it had discovered its hero. Rousseau, Goethe, Chateaubriand, Byron, and Scott had unwittingly contributed to it. The taut, efficient, unpoetical figure of the Corsican drill-master was turned into a world symbol by the same magic that Goethe used when he transmuted a puppet show into his mighty *Faust*.

Finally, it can be maintained that Romanticism was not *caused* by Napoleonism, any more than Napoleonism was *caused* by Romanticism. They reacted upon each other, no doubt: two logs burn more brightly when they burn together. Both were manifestations of our convenient old German friend, the Zeitgeist. In other words, Rousseau, the Revolution, Napoleon, Romanticism, are phases, sharply contrasted, yet inseparably linked, in the same historical drama.

II

Between 1815 and 1825, the man whose prestige was greatest in French literary circles was not Napoleon, but Chateaubriand. It seems almost ludicrous at present

¹ Georges Lote, "Napoléon et le Romantisme Français." *Romanische Forschungen*, xxxiii, 1915, pp. 247-304.

to compare the two. Gustave Lanson says that Chateaubriand had all the forms of pride, from that which is a virtue to that which is mere silliness, and, as an instance of silly vanity, he quotes the title of a chapter in Chateaubriand's *Memoirs*, "Bonaparte and I unknown Second Lieutenants." The absurdity was not so flagrant for the contemporaries. The man who had restored religious feeling in France through his book on *The Spirit of Christianity* (at least he claimed he had, and many were willing to take his word for it) had done nobler work than the one who, with his Concordat, had merely attempted a pragmatic solution of ecclesiastical difficulties, and had failed. Many people believed with Chateaubriand himself that it was a pamphlet of his that had secured the restoration of the Bourbons. The efficiency of the Empire seemed dull and material, now that the glamour of success no longer rested upon it. Chateaubriand, on the contrary, was the Knight of the Throne and the Altar. He enjoyed the subtle and many-sided prestige of the explorer, the aristocrat, the lover, the poet, the mystic. Sainte-Beuve, the great disenchanter, has turned the merciless light of his criticism upon Chateaubriand, the supreme enchanter, and it has become a favourite game with literary historians to expose the innumerable foibles of the once beloved *René*. We know that he did not roam the solitudes of the new world from the Northwest Passage to Florida; we know that his loyalty to the Principle of Legitimacy was a Romantic cloak in which he draped his superb egotism; we think that his Christian apologetics are frequently on a level with the most naïve lucubrations of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre; and when we read his famous catalogue of the "beauties of the Christian faith," we are too often reminded of a *Bondieuserie*, or religious art shop in the vicinity of Saint-Sulpice. But France, under the Restoration, accepted Chateaubriand uncritically. Dreamer, prophet, and man of action, consciously greater than the kings before whom he knelt, he was to be the pattern and exemplar of innumerable poets. Lamartine, who

sang Religion and Monarchy, travelled in the East, and became in 1848 the head of the French Government, reproduced most faithfully the many-sided life of the great model. Young Victor Hugo, burning with ambition, forgot that he was the son of a Napoleonic general, and wrote on his notebook: "I want to be Chateaubriand or nothing!" The Chatterton of Alfred de Vigny committed suicide because he could not be "the Pilot who reads the ship's course in the stars"—because he could not be a Chateaubriand. Balzac inscribed on a statuette of Napoleon: "What he failed to do by the sword, I shall achieve by the pen." Napoleon-worship? No doubt, but also Chateaubriand-worship—the man of letters contrasted with the warrior and, potentially at least, placed above him. And the causes that Balzac thus wanted to serve were the very ones that Chateaubriand had made fashionable—Catholicism and the Legitimate Monarchy.¹

Chateaubriand had risen to glory long before French Romanticism had formulated its creed or even found its name. He would have scorned to be considered as the founder of any school: splendid isolation was his favourite attitude, an attitude which he preserved even in death, for ever alone on his rock assailed by the waves. But in spite of his aloofness, he was felt to be the patriarch of the new literature: the Romanticists were indeed his brood, and there is no dominant trait in them that is not already found in him. Infinite tedium caused by the infinite emptiness of life; despair, as though under a mysterious curse; even the Byronic tinge of Satanic rebellion, not one of the symptoms revealed or described by Musset as the "disease of the century" was lacking in Chateaubriand's *René*; and that famous episode, which appeared first in the *Spirit of Christianity* in 1802, had been sketched several years earlier, with the first draft of the *Natchez*. At that time the career

¹ Maurice Barrès again, who blends so skilfully his political and his literary careers, his *Culte du Moi* and his worship of tradition, is in spirit a grandson of René.

of Napoleon was only beginning : it certainly could not yet have filled the world with gloom.

Musset was not wrong in ascribing the melancholy of his generation—a melancholy which, fortunately, was not all-pervasive—to the spectacle of a great historical catastrophe. But that cataclysm was of vaster proportion than the downfall of a single man, even though that man be named Napoleon. The genius, and even more the success, of Chateaubriand, both fully developed as early as 1802, prove this beyond a doubt. Chateaubriand had seen the Revolution : the Catholic, aristocratic, monarchical world in which he had been born lay in ruins at his feet. Was it the Revolution then which engendered “the disease of the century” ? But beyond Chateaubriand and his René we find Goethe and his Werther, Rousseau and his Saint-Preux : both suffering from the same world disenchantment that Musset depicted in 1836. We are therefore compelled to look for the root of Romanticism much earlier than Waterloo, earlier even than the Terror.

Between 1750 and 1850 a complete revolution took place—spiritual, literary, social, political—a new Renaissance, a new Reformation. The classical world, so secure on its foundations of tradition and reason, so consistent in the perfect harmony of king and church, art and society, was beginning to quake. It quaked because it was but a human construction, destined to grow, to serve its purpose for a brief period, then to decline, to become a hindrance, and to be swept aside, whilst the relentless flood of life went on. It was the approach of the cataclysm that unhinged delicate souls. The first tremor was sufficient to make a solid self-confident world seem flimsy and unreal. Men were dragged, as in a nightmare, by forces which they could not control, towards an unknown abyss. The frivolous continued to dance and smirk in spite of all shocks and rumblings. “Bah ! the old machine will last at least as long as we !” Optimists claimed to know whither they were carried, and that was to a Land of Promise. But poets felt the intense melancholy of a

life still smiling and soon to pass away. They experienced a nausea of uncertainty and dread. The times were out of joint, and spiritual health a thing of the past. Romanticism was not the Revolution itself: in many respects it was hostile to the Revolution. It was one of the reactions that the impending change was bound to produce—an inner trembling in which regret, hope, and fear were mingled.

This explains why the first symptoms of Romanticism can be detected at the same time as the first symptoms of the great Revolution, and, in one case at least, in the same man, Rousseau. The melancholy of Saint-Preux is Rousseau mourning over the old world that he condemns, and dreading the new that he himself is shaping. This explains also why Romanticism disappeared when the Revolution was at last complete, about the middle of the nineteenth century. Then a new synthesis, scientific, industrial, democratic, stood clearly in the place of ancient classicism, and a new formula in art and literature, realism, completed once more a consistent culture. Romanticism had been but a passing phase, the neurosis of a world in travail.

This conception of Romanticism accounts for its most notable traits: the illimitable egotism of the Romantic poets, and their undefinable longings. In a well-ordered age, be it Mediæval, Classical, or Scientific, the individual has his assigned place. He may be great, but only under discipline; he may aspire, but only to well-defined ends. All these restrictions disappear in the throes of a world's rebirth. There are no forbidden heights or depths: the self can roam and desire at will. And the result is invariably melancholy and despair, for man was not meant to clutch the infinite with his hands of flesh.

In this immense transformation from the classical to the modern world, the fall of Napoleon was a spectacular episode, but, after all, a minor one. Musset, writing in 1835 and 1836, when Napoleonism was in the air, gave to his despair a Napoleonic tinge. But it is not difficult to prove that this interpretation was not in accord with

the facts, even with those of his own experience. The *Confession of a Child of the Century* is, in its grand historical prelude, the most fanciful of all autobiographies.

The poet was two years old when the conquering career of Napoleon came to a halt in Moscow; he was five at the time of the final crash, Waterloo. His father, who was indeed connected with the War Office, but in a purely administrative capacity, did not "appear, bleeding, lift him to his gold-embroidered breast, and then, to horse and away." As a child and as a youth, Musset was delicate, high-strung, but happy, and unconscious of any blight. When he entered the world of Parisian letters, he described himself as "gay, young, and bold, flinging himself without a thought into adventure." He was a great favourite, for his youthful grace, and for that vein of *gaminerie*, which is hardly compatible with cosmic despair. He loved to astound the Philistines with the extravagance of his wit, and at the same time he was burlesquing the excesses of his elder brothers in Romanticism. The author of *Ode to the Moon* had yet to discover that, since 1815, the world was an aching void.

He was extremely young and impressionable: the Romanticists had not only the charm of rebellion, so irresistible to the adolescent heart, but they were immeasurably superior in genius to the old perukes of pseudo-Classicism: so Alfred became a Romanticist. The fashion was then to be Byronic—a blend of Beau Brummel and Mephistopheles—and Alfred, nothing loath, sported exquisite clothes, despaired and blasphemed most conscientiously. He did not know then why he was despairing and blaspheming; but Voltaire was as good a scapegoat as any, and so we had in *Rolla* the ringing invective against the patriarch and his "hideous smile."

Then passion broke on its wheel that charming trifle, the Page Chérubin of French literature. It wrung from him the ardent rhetoric of the *Confession*, the haunting cries of the *Nights*. Despair was no longer the Byronic mask of a callow Parisian "dandy," but the expression of his very soul. All that because Dr. Pagello, in Venice,

had nursed him through a severe brain fever, and appropriated as a fee the heart of his mistress. To bring Napoleon into this regrettable affair is superfluous. As a matter of fact, after thus contributing his mite to the Napoleonic Legend, Musset forgot Napoleon, as he had forgotten Voltaire. He did not settle into a respectable bourgeois: the witch Absinthe had closed the gate of return. But he grew into a mild classicist, the most authentic descendant, for the limpid and yet saucy charm of his prose, of his whilom *bête noire*, Voltaire. And he indited sonnets to Louis-Philippe: Romantic despair had been his wild oats.¹

III

It was not Napoleon who begat Romanticism: was it Romanticism that created Napoleon?

We do not take more seriously than the authors themselves the paradoxes of Pèrès and Whately: Napoleon is not a myth, like William Tell, and possibly Robin Hood. We do not even imply that the part of literary deformation was as great in the Napoleon Saga as in the Arthurian Romances or in the Carolingian cycle: the main facts were too well established. But in the trace that is left in the public mind, and which is, after all, the very substance of history, actual events matter much less than their interpretation. In that field literature, although not the sole agency, is extremely powerful. And literature, Romantic literature, has been at work upon the life of Napoleon.

So far as the origins of the Legend are concerned, however, Romanticism can plead: Not guilty. We have seen that the forerunner and first model of the school, Chateaubriand, had preserved under the Empire an attitude of hostility. When Napoleon was already falling, Chateaubriand hurled at him his pamphlet *On Buonaparte*

¹ The apocalyptic tone so noticeable in the early chapters of the *Confession* is in all likelihood due to the influence of Lamennais, whose *Words of a Believer* appeared in 1834.

and the Bourbons, forcible, no doubt, clear-sighted in many respects, and withal of almost naïve injustice and virulence. The fashion set by the prestigious writer was faithfully followed. For ten or twelve years Romanticism remained scrupulously monarchical and Catholic. Lamartine and Vigny, who were aristocrats like Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, the son of a plebeian Bonapartist officer, sang the restored lilies and the altars of a mediæval faith. Napoleon did not yet haunt their minds. They did not ignore him, but when they wrote about him it was in terms of singular coldness.

When the Legend first appeared in written form, soon after Napoleon's death, it was neither as genuine folklore, nor in the higher reaches of art. It was through the clever propaganda of the Saint Helena group (Las Cases, Gourgaud, O'Meara), and through commercial and political ventures of small literary pretensions and even smaller value.¹ The ground had been prepared by ten years of dull reaction. Napoleonism was found to be good material for anti-governmental controversies, and popular with the general public. So there was a rank growth of alleged "literature" about the Emperor, but without an atom of romantic idealism.

To this line of business belong the *History of Napoleon* by de Norvins (1827), the brilliant poem on *Napoleon in Egypt* (1828) by two clever journalists, Barthélémy and Méry, and also many songs of Béranger. Among these manufacturers of Napoleon ware, on a level with the makers of mugs and jugs, canes or plates, all with the Emperor's silhouette, his hat or his eagle, the most typical perhaps was Marco Saint-Hilaire. He had begun his career as a literary hack with inane little books on *The Art of Smoking*, or that of *Tying a Cravat*; then he had published edifying strings of anecdotes about their Royal Highnesses

¹ The *History of Napoleon and of the Grand Army in the Year 1812*, by de Ségur, is far above that level, both in sincerity and in style, but it is hardly a contribution to the "legend," for it describes in moderate, yet pitiless, terms the physical and intellectual sluggishness of Napoleon during the Russian campaign. Gourgaud, posing as Napoleon's champion, fought a duel with de Ségur on that account.

the Dauphiness, the Duke of Berry, and the Duke of Orleans ; when the Napoleonic tide set in, he remembered that he had been a page in the Imperial Court, and began pouring a stream of Memoirs which flowed for a third of a century. When the apparent triumph of liberalism and the return of the tricolour flag in 1830 gave a fresh impetus to Napoleonism, it was still in commercialized literature that the movement was most powerful. Every stage in Paris offered a Napoleonic play, and in a burlesque on that craze a whole company of Emperors was represented, tall and short, fat or thin, all with the grey coat, the cocked hat, and the fateful lock of hair, all sticking their fingers in their waistcoat and repeating in unison the inevitable words : " From the heights of these pyramids forty centuries are looking upon you ! Soldiers ! I am well pleased with you ! " Such a drama as *Napoleon Bonaparte*, by Alexander Dumas, was not far removed from the grand and very influential performances of the noted circus rider Franconi. The Napoleonic Legend came into French literature from below.

Higher than Marco Saint-Hilaire, Norvins, and even Dumas, we shall find among the most active apostles of the Legend Béranger and Thiers ; but neither of them was a Romanticist. On the other hand, even after the majority of the French people had been converted to liberalism, and to Napoleonism as the embodiment of liberal ideas, the leaders of Romanticism were still holding back. The younger members of the school, like Musset and Gautier, followed the current without resistance ; but it did not carry them very far. Those whose minds had been formed before, or immediately after, the fall of the Empire, Chateaubriand, Lamennais, Lamartine, Vigny, Michelet, remained aloof.

IV

There was no doubt a change in the attitude of Chateaubriand. He gave up the tone of rabid vilification that

had made his work *On Buonaparte and the Bourbons* at the same time effective and ludicrous. Still posing as the loyal supporter of the Bourbons, he was flirting with liberalism; he was enhancing the Romantic value of his Legitimism by letting it be understood that, in his own mind, Legitimism was and deserved to be a lost cause. He was a wilful Don Quixote calling upon the gallery to admire his heroic folly. He knew that it was among the new generation that he must seek an appreciative public, not among the venerable mummies of Bourbonism, who had never understood him at all. So the obstinate Knight of the White Flag and Catholic Altars exchanged courtesies with Béranger, the Napoleonist and anti-clerical songster. He went so far as to give a qualified blessing to Louis-Napoleon: an ageing charmer must insure his laurels against all contingencies. The Empire had been the time of his maturity; it was now, in his memory, "the good old days," when he had restored Religion and defied the Despot. More and more, he thought: "Napoleon and I." The Emperor and he were twins in age, and, he thought, twins in glory. The survivor felt that in belittling his rival he would be lowering his own pedestal. To these mellowing influences we owe the gentler tone that prevails in the *Memoirs*. Bonaparte is still presented as a usurper, a tyrant, a man of insensate pride and unscrupulous cunning: still Chateaubriand confesses that the praise which Napoleon gave him in Saint Helena "tickled him deliciously." An incomparable poet, now that he no longer had any political purpose to serve, he felt more keenly than anyone else the epic possibilities of the Legend; and we do not know, in the vast realm of Napoleonic literature, a more splendid treatment of that unique theme than the one we find in the *Memoirs from Beyond the Tomb*. The retreat from Moscow in particular is unrivalled. The glorious lines of Victor Hugo in *The Expiation*—a funeral symphony, with muffled drums and sudden clangour of cymbals—reveal too plainly the effort of the artist, whilst we are carried, breathless, uncritical, by the majestic sweep of Chateau-

briand's prose. He had not become converted to Bonapartism, but he had discovered Napoleon as a *motive* for his subtle and gorgeous art. After all, was he ever a Royalist, was he ever a Christian, for any better reason?

There was no "will to make-believe" in that other Breton, Lamennais—nothing but passionate consistency. It was out of consistency that he passed, with sudden bewildering flight, from the extreme right to the extreme left of political and religious thought. He was a theocrat first and last: the will of God must prevail. When he had satisfied himself that the right of kings was divine but in name, he swung stiffly to the divine right of the people. The Legitimist and Ultramontane of 1824 became the free Christian democrat of 1834. But at no time in his career would he swerve from his line as a result of Napoleon's attraction. Under the Empire he had suffered from the police, so much so that, during the Hundred Days, he found it safer to leave France. When he became a democrat, his fierce sincerity could not be tempted by the clever trap of Saint Helena: Napoleon the champion of the people's rights. He devoted his whole energy to attacking the Napoleonic institutions which were particularly oppressive for the spirit: the Concordat and the University. This man who was revered as modern prophet by the noblest in his generation never yielded to the materialistic prestige of Napoleon.

Neither did Lamartine bow to the popular idol. "I did not love Bonaparte," he said. "I was brought up in the horror of his tyranny. In writing this ode (*On the Death of Bonaparte*), which has sometimes been thought too severe, I believed I was too indulgent." The ruthless efficiency of Napoleon could not but repel the most idealistic, the most ethereal of all French poets. But it would be an injustice to imagine Lamartine as merely an Æolian harp, vibrating exquisitely to the breath of a gentle breeze. There was no lack of strength and practical sense in the man. He had a vision of what

railways would mean in a new civilization, whilst Thiers, the embodiment of bourgeois common sense, derided them as mere toys, and Arago was heaping pseudo-scientific objections which seemed irrefutable. He saw the future of democracy at a time when Guizot, the learned, profound, experienced Guizot, remained hopelessly blind. He cherished the ideal of world federation three-quarters of a century before Woodrow Wilson. He did write the most melodious of Romantic barcarolles : but he was also an active and responsible statesman. Almost alone, he warned his contemporaries against the proposed apotheosis of Napoleon in 1840. The glory of the Emperor seemed to him both meretricious and brutal, and he foresaw the influence that a recrudescence of Napoleonism would have upon French and international politics. He would not have been among the loose thinkers who, whilst reviling the Germany of 1914, condoned the policy of Bismarck and worshipped Napoleon.

Alfred de Vigny, born seven years later than Lamartine, made his debut about the same time, and could even claim to have been a pioneer in Romantic poetry. He had been brought up in a college of the Napoleonic type, under a discipline more rigid than that of a camp, and with military glory held out as the only goal worth while. So he became a soldier, but just too late to serve under Napoleon. He took part in one expedition only, the Spanish war engineered by Chateaubriand, for the purpose of checking liberalism in the peninsula, and of providing easy laurels for the Duke of Angoulême. He did not even see what little there was to be seen in that lamentable enterprise—one of those successes that are more dismal than the average fiasco : he stopped on the wrong side of the Pyrenees. For nearly thirteen years his martial energy was consumed in parade-ground drill, kit inspection, and mess management. We might expect that in the tedious leisure of garrison life he would regret the grand epic of war that had just closed. No doubt he suffered acutely from the dull servitude imposed upon the soldier. But he was a thinker and a gentleman. Just because he

admired in the Army the ideal of service and self-sacrifice, he hated the misuse of that noble instrument for purposes of brutal aggrandizement. So we have the paradox of a soldier by choice, the poet and philosopher of military life, who is not a worshipper of the soldier's idol, Napoleon. One of his finest stories, *The Life and Death of Captain Renaud*, is a penetrating study of what he calls *Seidism*,¹ the abject devotion to an unscrupulous leader. Renaud, brought up as a Napoleon-worshipper, is captured by the English. He discovers a flawless example of military virtue in Admiral Collingwood, whom duty keeps eternally banished from home, the prisoner of his honour and of his country. When Renaud is released and resumes his modest post in the French Army, he cannot fail to be struck by the meretricious and coarse elements in the grand spectacle of the Napoleonic Empire. Vigny shows the Emperor himself, in the words ascribed to Pope Pius VII, as "commediante, tragediante," or, as Mr. Lytton Strachey puts it, "a play actor, and a vulgar one at that." The moral authority of Alfred de Vigny is great. No French poet has so admirably combined loftiness of purpose, delicacy of thought and feeling, and virile stoicism. It is curious to note that, whilst he felt no respect for Napoleon I, he rallied to Napoleon III—a sovereign sensitive, like himself, to "the majesty of human sufferings."

Michelet's opposition to Napoleon pervaded every fibre of his being. He was the son of a printer, and a worshipper of the Press: a free press and a Napoleon could not live side by side. He was the apostle of love: Napoleon sowed violence and reaped hatred. As a poet and as a historian, Michelet ranks high, and deserves to rank higher. He and his generation are still suffering from the defeat of their ideal in 1848, when international brotherhood, democracy, and social justice were scornfully brushed aside as impracticable dreams: as though the Men of Blood and Iron were not dreamers too, but dreamers

¹ From the character of Séide, a fanatical follower of the Prophet, in Voltaire's tragedy *Mahomet*.

of nightmares! In one respect, Michelet is an eyewitness of singular value, because, almost alone among writers of the first rank, he came straight from the people, and not from the bourgeoisie. He was seventeen when the Empire fell: and he assures us that the Parisian working classes had never been reconciled to the rule of Napoleon.

Chateaubriand, Lamennais, Lamartine, Vigny, Michelet—all the leaders of Romanticism whose minds had reached the adult stage by 1815—were not Napoleon-worshippers. Those of their contemporaries who took the opposite side—Béranger, Stendhal, Thiers—were not Romanticists. It was the younger generation of Romanticism—Dumas, Hugo, Quinet, Musset, Gautier—that rallied to Napoleonism. The cleavage is very definite. Three or four years make little difference in the age of a grown man: they may be decisive in the formation of boys still in their teens. In 1830, Vigny and Hugo, Michelet and Quinet, belonged to the same generation, but in 1815 Vigny and Michelet were young men, Hugo and Quinet were children.

In the light of these facts we may absolve Napoleon of any responsibility in the inception of Romanticism, and we may likewise dismiss any accusation against Romanticism for creating the Napoleonic Legend. The two phenomena are contemporary, but they are related only in the most general way. The Romantic spirit was launched forth by Rousseau in his *Nouvelle Héloïse*, eight years before Napoleon was born. It had assumed its modern aspect in *René*, whilst Chateaubriand was still in exile, and before Napoleon had risen to supreme power. The Romantic school fought its first battles under the white flag of the Bourbons. It was not until 1827, or even 1830, that the younger members only veered towards Napoleon-worship: their elders remained hostile. The two movements have many points of resemblance, and many points of contact: it could hardly be otherwise, since they affected the same nation at the same moment. But it would be venturesome to trace between the two

any more intimate relation than the very general one which, at any one time, bind together all the manifestations of a country's culture.¹

¹ Among the younger men there was one at least who remained violently hostile to Napoleon : Auguste Barbier. He is deeply forgotten to-day : he was deeply forgotten long before the end of his long life. When, in order to tease Napoleon III, the French Academy elected him to membership, some forty years after his one great success, Paris rubbed its eyes at sight of the ghost : and he was to survive that quasi-posthumous triumph for over twelve years. But he found that one day, in the electric atmosphere of 1830, such impassioned accents and such a fitting rhythm that only the very best passages in Chénier and Victor Hugo can bear comparison with Barbier's *Iambes*. In the memory of every Frenchman there sound still the breathless epic gallop of *La Cavale (the Wild Mare)*—"O lank haired Corsican ! How fair was thy France, In the sunblaze of Messidor !" —the poignant line on the Vendôme Column : "That bronze which mothers can never bear to see" ; and the splendid tirade in which, reciting the martyrdom of France, he concludes : "Upon one man alone falls my whole hatred : cursèd be thou, O Napoleon !"

Chapter III

NAPOLEON IN THE ROMANTIC ERA

II. THE MAJOR PROPHETS OF THE LEGEND.

I

THE ROMANTICISTS, following the lead of Chateaubriand, were at first, as we have seen, the devoted "Knights of the Throne and the Altar." They came legitimately by their Legitimism: for they were an aristocratic band, the most aristocratic that had ever graced French literature; the classical school under Louis XIV was hopelessly plebeian in comparison. By the side of François René, Viscount de Chateaubriand, we find Alphonse de Lamartine, Alfred Count de Vigny, in harmony with the doctrines of Joseph Count de Maistre, of the Viscount de Bonald, and of Félicité de Lamennais.¹ Men who have ancestors are prone to turn their glances backward, and to become, in the compact phrase of Barbey d'Aurevilly, "prophets of the past." All these gentlemen grew disenchanted with the Restoration, a musty substitute for the chivalric monarchy of their dreams; several were later to adopt modern and even radical ideas, but not one was ever fully reconciled with Napoleon, the usurper, and—worse—the vulgarian.

It is therefore not among the aristocrats but among the bourgeois that we must look for Napoleon-worshippers, and it would be difficult to find more perfect specimens

¹ The *particule* "de" is not a reliable badge of nobility: Béranger and Saint-Beuve dropped theirs, which they knew to be meaningless; Balzac assumed one to which he was not entitled. But the authors mentioned above were actually of noble birth, even Lamennais, whose family had been made noble on the eve of the Revolution.

of the bourgeois spirit than the two most active propagandists of the Legend, Béranger and Thiers.

The middle class was obscured for a while by the titled company of the Romanticists, but no eclipse of the bourgeoisie in any domain can be complete or of long duration in France, a country in which that class has been the dominant influence for several hundred years. Now, some very active elements in the bourgeoisie saw with dismay the return of the Bourbons. For a quarter of a century the bourgeois had enjoyed the sweetness of despising the masses without being despised in their turn by a class above. The flocking back of the *émigrés*, with their antediluvian notions of caste, exasperated them. For a quarter of a century, also, they had felt comfortable in the possession of property confiscated from the nobles and from the Church. The very word "Restoration" had an ominous sound: it seemed a perpetual challenge to their title. Finally, as the Church and the Nobility struck an intimate alliance, as inevitable as it was unwise, the old Voltairean anticlericalism of the bourgeoisie flared up again. Even in the Middle Ages the French communes had been singularly impatient of priestcraft: how much more so, when the Church, hand in hand with political reaction, seemed to threaten their purse and to wound their vanity by the same operation!

It was against this reactionary spirit that the bourgeoisie set up Napoleon as their hero. That the ruthless autocrat should become the idol of "liberalism" was a bold transformation indeed—almost as bold as the one which turned Charlemagne into a saint. But the paradox will seem less glaring if we remember that bourgeois "liberalism" was a misnomer. The bourgeois never wanted Liberty, Equality, or Fraternity: what they wanted was order, the protection of property, and the suppression of all privileges except their own. These benefits Napoleon had actually given them. While he reigned, they had groaned under the constant strain of economic and military warfare, and they saw his fall

without any immediate regret. Now that he was gone, they used his name and his memory to attack the Restoration: it was the Emperor of the *Parvenus* against the King of the *Émigrés*.

In this struggle against reaction, bourgeois "liberalism" sought the support of the democratic elements. Neither party, as a matter of fact, was genuinely liberal: liberalism is a forlorn hope, the doctrine of oppressed minorities; it has no appeal for groups and classes conscious of their power. The bourgeois leaders and the people had common enemies: there is no stronger bond of union. They were using with a fair degree of sincerity the same formulæ, those of 1789. They had the same flag, the Tricolour. So at times it was difficult to tell them apart. For three days, the "three glorious days" of July, 1830, Liberals, Democrats and Bonapartists fought side by side. Louis-Philippe was to be "the best of Republics," a republic, however, in which the well-to-do alone had a vote. This triumph of the "liberals" made Béranger "the national poet," Thiers a foremost influence in French politics, and Napoleon officially a demigod.

Béranger was a man of the eighteenth century, a liberal bourgeois, sane, shrewd, cheerful, without a spark of romantic madness, romantic despair, or romantic genius. In his art and thought he resembled Voltaire, as closely as a suburban tavern may resemble a château. Like the majority of the bourgeoisie, he admired the Army, but preferred to share in its arduous deeds by proxy only. He did not have to buy himself off, having resorted to the simpler expedient of keeping his name out of the register. So he was, throughout the Empire, what we have been taught to call a slacker or draft-evader, and felt ill at ease in the conversation of gendarmes. Like the rest of his class, he found the cost of the grand imperial venture rather heavy; and when Napoleon had suffered his irretrievable disaster in Russia, Béranger came out with a mocking song, *The King of Yvetot*. What we good bourgeois desire is not a new Cæsar, a new Charlemagne, but a kindly, cheery, homey

king, crowned by Jeanneton his chambermaid with a cotton night-cap, and fond of discussing his jug of cider with his loyal villagers. It was a vulgarized version of the Henry IV legend, and in part an anticipation of the reign of Louis-Philippe: for, if Louis-Philippe did not wear a cotton night-cap in the streets, he was proud of his umbrella. With all his limitations, Béranger had too keen a mind to be a Napoleon-worshipper so long as there was on the throne a Napoleon to worship.

When the Restoration came, Béranger felt keenly the supercilious airs of the *émigrés* (*The Marquis of Carabas*) and the insidious influence of the priests (*The Black Men*). We must add that he suffered sincerely from the humiliation of his country, and never forgave the Bourbons for having returned in the train of foreign armies. The half-hearted attempts of the Government to throttle the liberty of the Press gave extraordinary prominence to Béranger. His neat and nimble stanzas, supported by catchy tunes, spread among the people with a rapidity that baffled the police. Béranger, who had been a minor official with a pretty gift for bacchanalian verse, found himself a national character. When a foolish administration gave him the consecration of martyrdom and imprisoned him at Vincennes, his cell became a pilgrimage. He professed to be weary with this oppressive fame; but he kept cultivating it as though he relished it to the full. No Frenchman was a more successful artist in popularity, not even Victor Hugo or Napoleon himself. He carefully composed his character: a good fellow, a satirist, a sage—Rabelais, Voltaire, Franklin compacted into one. The present writer has known excellent people who were still under the spell of that “faux bonhomme.”

Whilst the dusty *marionnettes* of the Ancient Regime were gravely striding across their miniature stage of Court and Parliament, Béranger evoked the Little Corporal, who, with all his faults, was a creature of blood and muscle, not of strings and sawdust. No criticism could have been so biting as this contrast. The response of the people was immediate. With undeniable sincerity,

but also for partisan purposes and with a view to his own success, Béranger deliberately fostered the growth and diffusion of the Legend. He made Napoleon the third name in his lyrical trinity. The first was "le Dieu des Bonnes Gens," the God of Good Fellows, who winks understandingly at toppers. The second was Lisette, that easy, merry, fickle minx of a grisette, who represented all the poesy of what young bourgeois call love. A hero of a different stamp would have spoilt the set.

There is probably no piece in French political literature half so effective as Béranger's simple song, *The Memories of the People*. "They will talk of His glory—Under thatched roofs, for ages. . . ." We see the country folks crowding round the grandmother who had seen Him—for in Béranger's poems no name is needed: Napoleon has become LUI, emphatically. She tells how, dressed in his grey coat and little cocked hat, he once passed through the village, with an escort of kings; how she saw him again, at Notre Dame, radiant with pride, for the baptism of the King of Rome; how one evening, during the desperate campaign of France, he knocked and came in, "sat on this very chair, drank out of this very glass," which she has preserved as priceless relics. And we can see childish eyes growing big with awe and wonder: "HE spoke to you, Granny!—He sat right here.—You still have His glass!"

This has been accepted as a *bona fide* picture of popular opinion. No doubt it has elements of truth: the peasants talked and sang of Napoleon, in the long winter evenings, as they had talked of Mandrin, Cartouche, and Marlborough, as they were to talk of Fualdès. But Béranger's testimony cannot be accepted at its face value. For one thing, the *Memories of the People* did not even claim to describe existing conditions: it was frankly prophetic. "The humble roof, fifty years hence—Will remember no other story"—when the lass who saw the Emperor has become a grandmother. Then, Béranger was a Parisian born and bred. He knew no more about "thatched cottages" than did the society poets of the eighteenth century,

whom he was continuing on a lower social plane. He made the Napoleonism of the masses much more universal, much more profound, than the facts seem to warrant. He created to a very large extent the "memories" which he was supposed merely to transcribe. It was a curious piece of psychical surgery. He grafted a semi-artificial element into the living mind of the people: as the surgeon was skilful and the circumstances favourable, that artificial element came to be absorbed. A poet, if he be popular at all, is always both a witness and an agent. If he merely followed, he would not be hailed as a master; but if he went too hopelessly against the main current, he would be ignored or suppressed as a lunatic. Popularity is one of the forms of salesmanship: give the people what they want, but first of all make them realize, or believe, that they want it. Béranger did not "invent" Napoleon: his Napoleon had been invented for him at Saint Helena. But Napoleon was no longer quite the same, in popular imagination, after Béranger had taken hold of him. "On a souvent besoin d'un plus petit que soi."

Thiers was, in mind as well as in body, the perfect type of the *petite bourgeoisie*. Positive, keen-minded in practical affairs, short of sight, however, in his own realms of finance and politics, he suspected the existence of higher spheres only to deride them. To the end of his life he remained persuaded that Romanticism was sheer nonsense: "Romanticism! It is the Commune," he said to his secretary Rémusat. He meant the spirit of eternal discontent and wild rebellion, and he was not far wrong. But discontent may be divine, and rebellion holy.

Thiers was a popular journalist whom the Revolution of 1830 turned into a politician, and whom official historians have been attempting to turn into a statesman. He sincerely admired the Napoleonic regime as the best possible compromise between "liberal" ideas and efficient order: a system that would keep both the aristocracy and the masses in their proper places, away from the seat of power. It was he who, as minister of Louis-Philippe,

completed the monuments erected by Napoleon to his own glory, and who engineered the grand finale of the Return from Saint Helena. And he patiently reared another monument of vast dimensions, the twenty volumes of his *History of the Consulate and the Empire*. It remains a model of lucidity, especially in the treatment of financial problems and of military campaigns: for Thiers, the least military of men in appearance, thought himself akin to Napoleon in his knowledge of strategy—the Little Corporal, after all, was not much more impressive in stature than his historian! There is no philosophy in Thiers, and the sentiment—chauvinism, worship of the sword—is not of the highest quality. But he loved his subject, and he knew it well. He knew it better than any later investigator can hope to know it, for he had consorted with the survivors of the Empire, and he himself had guided, as prime minister, the huge governmental machine constructed forty years before by Napoleon. His intelligence is extraordinarily acute within its limited range. He has the Voltairean gift of perfect clearness, without, however, Voltaire's genius for thought-compelling epigram. His style, undistinguished except for rare patches of somewhat antiquated eloquence, carries you along, without flights or sudden drops, without tedious digression—a masterpiece of alert pedestrianism in narrative prose.

Of this tremendous piece of work, the mightiest in the whole range of Napoleonic literature (Masson is but a gleaner, though he gleaned by the armful), the most influential next to the Memorial of Las Cases, the most popular after the songs of Béranger, we could say nothing that has not been better said by G. Lanson: "That *History of the Consulate and the Empire* is the work of a very imprudent and blind statesman; with Béranger and Victor Hugo, Thiers created the great movement of Napoleonic idolatry which was to lead to the Second Empire. He imagined too easily that all the glory of Napoleon would redound to the advantage of the July Monarchy, which had brought back the Tricolour. He

was carried away by his imagination: this little man, with his positive turn of mind, had the religion of success; he was indulgent to those who triumph, he was dazzled by military prestige and intoxicated with military glory. In this respect he belonged to the people: "il était peuple." He loved soldiers, uniforms, the rolling of drums, the vision of wild charges and heroic slaughter; all the poetry of his soul was concentrated in those bellicose emotions."¹

II

Stendhaliens and *Beylistes* would never forgive us if we mentioned the object of their cult in the same chapter as Béranger and Thiers: but it is not our fault if the three men had very much the same ideal in politics, religion, and even style. Beyle himself considered Béranger as the greatest poet of his time. We may be shocked at first in discovering such kinship between the laureate of the populace and the esoteric analyst who, as he had prophesied, was to be understood by "the happy few" about 1880. Yet the resemblances are many. Both were bourgeois; both were pure Voltaireans, in their frank sensualism, in their scepticism, in their anti-clericalism; both were violently opposed to the aristocratic and devout Restoration.

The Napoleonism of Beyle was natural enough. Our most indelible impressions are those of early manhood: just as Beyle was coming of age, Bonaparte, still First Consul, was at the zenith of his glory. Beyle, like Béranger, was to remain a Bonapartist rather than an Imperialist. In 1804 their minds were no longer plastic enough to accept the new regime without misgivings. Thanks to the protection of his kinsman, the splendid administrator Daru, the young man entered the Army with a staff position. He did not remain long in the fighting branch of the service: he left his lieutenancy in the dragoons for a post in the commissariat. He has been called, rather unkindly, "the ace of the Quartermaster

¹ Cf. Lanson, *Histoire de la Littérature Française*, 12ème Edit., p. 922

Corps"; but the man who, alone perhaps in the Grand Army, shaved regularly during the retreat from Moscow need not present any other credential. Strangely enough, he was inactive, apathetic, in 1813, 1814, 1815, the critical years; whilst the Empire was crashing, he was on leave, absorbed entirely in rather commonplace love affairs. But after the fall of Napoleon he showed quiet loyalty and courage, to a degree rare among the grand officers and dignitaries of the regime. Although not wealthy, he did not even consider accepting a position under the Bourbons; and in 1817, long before Napoleonism had become fashionable, he dedicated his *History of Italian Painting* to "His Majesty Napoleon the Great." It may be taken as a sign of the times that this dedication, in which he vented indirectly all his hatred and contempt for the Restoration, did not cause the slightest stir in Parisian letters or politics. Beyle was destined to be "out of season," even when he was in agreement with the Philistines. He left in his papers fragments of a *Life of Napoleon*. We may surmise that he grew disgusted with the task, when Napoleon had become the stock in trade of hacks like Marco Saint-Hilaire: in the same spirit as Lord Balfour, who, interrupted by a sudden burst of applause, inquired innocently: "Did I say something foolish?"

There are two Napoleonisms in him: the Napoleonism of Beyle, the army man, the Voltairean bourgeois, the admirer of Béranger; and the Napoleonism of Stendhal, the author of *Le Rouge et le Noir*. Stendhal admired in the Emperor an example of that Italian *virtù*, that ruthless energy, of which he was passionately fond. For that bourgeois, that believer in "la lo-gique," who read and transcribed page after page of the Civil Code in order to pattern his style after it, had his grain of Romanticism. He loved passion, and even violence. He revealed the oddest partiality even for very prosaic criminals of his days; he could have written in all soberness an essay on *Murder as One of the Fine Arts*. He praised his hero Julien Sorel both for the self-control manifested in his

abysmal hypocrisy, and for the frantic outburst of revengefulness which ruins him at the end. It was not Napoleon the liberal that interested Stendhal: it was Napoleon the poet of energy, the hero of deceit, an outlaw on the grandest scale, a Julien Sorel on the throne. It was he who bequeathed to Taine the idea of Napoleon as the last of the Italian *condottieri*, a Castruccio Castracani, a Cesare Borgia; and although Taine, according to his wont, has worked that theory to the very verge of absurdity, its permanent value cannot be denied.

Napoleonism, the whole stock in trade of Thiers, is merely incidental in Balzac. We find only a few glimpses of Bonaparte in the *Human Comedy*. In the opening pages of *The Vendetta*—a brief and minor work—the First Consul pardons and protects a compatriot from his half-savage island. He has already identified himself with the Roman and French ideas of law, and will not countenance private feuds; but he is still Corsican enough to understand a vendetta, and he is astute enough to secure for himself a terrible and secret instrument. In *A Mysterious Affair*, the Emperor is seen on the eve of Jena: again he is shown forgiving, and again with a reserve of cold calculation in his magnanimity: the gentlemen, whom he wants to enlist in his service, are pardoned, the commoner has to die. The majesty of concentrated omnipotence is admirably expressed in a single phrase: “his glance went through Lawrence’s head like a ray of light.” In the first chapter of *The Woman of Thirty* we find a scene which etches itself upon our memory: the last review ever held by Napoleon on the parade ground of the imperial Tuileries. We are in 1813: the Emperor is preparing to leave for the German campaign. Soldiers and spectators are filled with the same forebodings: upon the battle that is soon to be fought will depend the fate of the Empire and of France herself. The cry that bursts from the crowd: “Long live the Emperor!” is no longer one of blind faith and admiration: it is a supreme challenge to fate, a desperate “will to believe” in the one man who could still retrieve

the destiny of the country. This blending of universal anguish, proud memories, and obstinate hope, is expressed as Balzac alone could express it. We feel with him that "for a flashing instant (the scene) was no longer anything human: it was magical, a figure of divine power, or, better still, a fugitive image of that fugitive reign." It is curious that we should have to seek one of Balzac's finest pages in the most chaotic of his books—a farrago of realistic analysis and wild melodrama, unconvincing and dismal as a whole.

The Country Doctor contains a brief masterpiece, which had been published separately, *The Napoleon of the People*. We are in 1829. The peasants have gathered in a barn for the evening. Goguelat, a veteran, is telling them, with great gusto, the horrific story of "the courageous hunchback." When he is through, at their urgent request, he "tells them the Emperor." It is a complete myth of the approved type. The story begins before the birth of the hero, and refuses to accept the fact of his death. Napoleon, pledged by his mother to be God's agent, is no common mortal. He is invulnerable, ubiquitous; he goes through the net of British cruisers as though his ship had become invisible; he communicates with his star through a supernatural medium, the Red Man. His career was announced by prophecies and his claims were supported by miracles. He was at last betrayed, imprisoned, lashed to a peak ten thousand feet high, on the other side of the globe. But, unconquerable, immortal, he holds himself in readiness; and when the Red Man brings the word to him, he will appear anew, and make the French Army the arbiter of the world.

This epic framework is obvious enough. In Edgar Quinet, in Victor Hugo, similar ideas strike us as forced rather than sublime. Balzac realized that, in the nineteenth century, the proper medium for a "Legend" was not heroic poetry, but the untaught verve of the common people. Like Béranger, but with infinitely greater spirit and more convincing realism, he has reconstituted a genuine folk-tale. The implied parallel between

Napoleon and Jesus, so exasperating in literary books such as Elie Faure's, does not shock us here: without sacrilegious intent, Goguelat borrows the outlines of his myth from the greatest story he has ever heard, that of the Messiah. His narrative is not a personal record, but his own experiences in Egypt, at the Moskowa, give a touch of reality to his little saga. Every detail is consistently worked out from the point of view of the private soldier. The "grumbler" worships his Emperor, but has no patience with the showy staff officers. Unable to read or write, he looks askance at the "intriguers" who can, and thus get promoted over his head. It is fascinatingly done, crackling with homely wit, with hardly any word that a shrewd peasant could not use.

These few passages in the huge mass of Balzac's works have been isolated, magnified, and whole theories built upon them. It would be passing strange if the man who strove to describe the whole society of his time had ignored Napoleon altogether: it is strange enough that he should have mentioned him so seldom. The tone of his direct references is dispassionate. Napoleon-worshippers could not take exception to it, but neither would the enemies of Napoleon feel rebuked. The fourth and most important passage, Goguelat's narrative, tells us simply what was thought and said of Napoleon in 1829: further than that Balzac does not commit himself. On the contrary, he plainly indicates the element of popular deformation in the story: he does not expect us to believe in the Red Man, or in the long vigil of the Emperor, Barbarossa-like, on his tropical eyrie. One of the factors in this deformation is conscious artistry. Goguelat is no mere witness, like the deaf old engineer by his side, who helped build the bridge across the Beresina: he is a professional rustic *raconteur*. He can tell the story of the *Courageous Hunchback* with as much verve as that of Napoleon. Especially in the relation of the Egyptian campaign, he delights in the stock-in-trade of Oriental fairy tales: princesses as fair as day, and jewels by the shovelful. When he ventures on a particularly bold

trait of imagination, we can see him wink to his audience : Take it or leave it as you please—I can't say that I saw it with my own eyes. And his hearers listen to him in the same spirit of eager but conscious credulity. It is a fine story, that makes them laugh, tremble, and weep like children : and, like children, they will want to hear it over and over again ; but, after all, it is a story.

We shall never know for certain whether Balzac took down the essentials of his narrative from the lips of an actual Goguelat, or whether he freely reconstructed what, in his opinion, soldiers and peasants must have thought. He was equally capable of recording and of recreating facts : if not *the* world (if there be such a thing as *the* world), at least *a* world. For this greatest of observers was also a visionary, and the *Human Comedy* directly challenges, on the field of epic imagination, Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

If Balzac gave us only glimpses of Napoleon, he painted on the contrary admirable portraits of the Napoleonic veterans : full-size, bold, and yet minute, with the intensity of life which is found perhaps in no other writer except Shakespeare and Saint-Simon. The best known of these portraits are far from flattering. Philippe Bridau is a magnificent scoundrel, and Baron Hulot the contemptible victim of animal passion. They remind us of Stendhal's scorn for most of his colleagues : “*des manches à sabre*,” he called them—human sword-handles. The man who drew these sinister figures was at least not taken in by the vulgar aspects of Napoleonism.

If you want to find in Balzac a tone of reverence and unqualified admiration, it is not his allusions to Napoleon that must be scanned, but those to Fouché. For if Balzac was an admirer of the Emperor, he was a worshipper of the Minister of Police. To most of us, even after the fine study of Louis Madelin, the man is an abomination. In order to understand Balzac's paradoxical taste, we must remember that the author of the *Human Comedy* began with the wildest brand of popular romances. Even in his maturity, even in books full of the keenest

psychological and material realism, like *Father Goriot*, we find him relapsing into dark, melodramatic intrigues. He believed in esoteric history, secret empires, strong silent men invisibly pulling the strings of magnificent puppets for the satisfaction of the naïve multitude. From that point of view Napoleon was rather too obvious for him. Fouché, on the contrary, the humble unfrocked priest, more powerful through his craftiness than the general at the head of a million men, the universal spider spreading his net throughout the vast empire until the Master himself was helpless in its invisible web—Fouché, who in 1815 was the arbiter of Napoleon's fate—such a character, sinister and gigantic, would appeal to the author of *Ferragus*, *History of the Thirteen*.

It would seem venturesome, therefore, to call Balzac an orthodox and thoroughgoing Napoleon-worshipper. At any rate, he was no Bonapartist: he was a Legitimist. He wrote "by the light of those two eternal truths, Religion and Monarchy." This was part of the aristocratic pose which he adopted, and which contrasted so oddly with his origin, his burly figure, and his ambitions as a business man. But in all religions the spirit and the letter may differ widely, and Balzac the legitimist might at the same time have a lurking devotion for Napoleon. Did he not have on his desk a statuette of the demigod? The career of boundless conquests that he dreamed of for himself and for his heroes, Rastignac, Du Marsay, Rubempré, might be called "the Imitation of Our Lord Napoleon."

No doubt Balzac shared in the fascination which energy and even violence exerted upon his generation. The father of Realism, he was none the less a man of the Romantic era; and Romanticism, it must be borne in mind, was, among many other things, a rebellion against all restraints: classical taste, effete society manners, Philistine morality. So Napoleon would loom large in his eyes, as the most splendid poet of unscrupulous energy that modern history had brought forth. Let us not forget, however, that such a state of mind was anterior to

Napoleon: it was that of the *Sturm und Drang* period in Germany—the exaltation of the free lance and the brigand. In England it was to lead, independently, to the wild careers of the two archangels of revolt, Shelley and Byron. Napoleon became one of the symbols of that state of mind: he was not the only one. Nor was he the most obvious: he was still thought of by most men as the conqueror of anarchy, rather than as the supreme Anarch.

Classicism means conformity, Romanticism the possession of the world by the Ego. “A nous deux maintenant!” Rastignac’s challenge to Paris could have been the motto of Julien Sorel as well as of Napoleon. But in his quest for power Julien Sorel could see two avenues only, the Red and the Black, the Napoleonic army with its revolutionary background, the Church and her support of ancient society. The first was practically closed after Waterloo, and Stendhal’s hero started with determined step upon the other road. Balzac brushes the army aside as a factor in modern life: his *Scenes from Military Life* are a mere promise. The Church he recognized as a greater power: his most impassioned descant on that theme is found on the lips of his favourite character, Jacques Collin, *alias* Vautrin, *alias* Trompela-Mort, the escaped convict masquerading as Father Carlos Herrera. But his “clericalism” did not play a very great part in his works or in his life. A better prophet than Stendhal, he saw two other avenues, the Press and money. Remember the inscription on his statuette of Napoleon: “What he failed to accomplish by the sword I shall achieve by the pen.” The pen mightier than the sword! This is Chateaubriand’s conception, not Napoleon’s. Money! Has any reader of Balzac ever doubted that the *Human Comedy* was the epic of money? Balzac was for ever imagining his volcanic energy at the service of a great financial career: he wanted to be the Napoleon of the Stock Exchange. His ideal—take it for what it is worth—is not the soldier who wins glory on the battlefield, but the profiteer who

makes millions out of the campaign. In his eyes, military fame was antiquated. With the Saint-Simonians, he was groping for a new age of industrial enterprise, vast and bold. If a Genie could offer him a new start, he would probably choose to be Balzac again; he might hesitate between Napoleon, Chateaubriand, and Fouché, but he would probably end by choosing as his last avatar the Duke de Morny.¹

Our study of Balzac's Napoleonism remains perforce inconclusive. Balzac neither sought nor shunned Napoleon in his writings. He was neither a devotee nor a scoffer of the popular cult. He admired the Emperor's energy, but was not blind to his ultimate failure. The prestige of the soldier neither attracted him irresistibly, as it did Thiers, nor repelled him, as it did Lamartine: for Balzac was persuaded that the foundation of modern power was economic and not military.

III

We have reserved Victor Hugo for the end, as the greatest, perhaps, and at any rate as the complete epitome of his generation. Before we turn to him, however, we should like to mention briefly a few well-known contributors to Napoleonic literature. We have already discussed Alfred de Musset and his *Confession*: the introductory chapter, with its apocalyptic solemnity, was a brief excursion into a realm rather alien to Musset's nature. Alexandre Dumas Père was, it will be remembered, the head of a literary factory which, long before Mr. Ford, had discovered the secret of quantity production. It was computed that, at the peak of its output, the head of the concern could barely have dictated, in an uninterrupted stream, all the works that bore his signature. No disparagement is implied: the products of the Dumas

¹ De Morny, the illegitimate half-brother of Napoleon III: statesman, clubman, wit, *arbiter elegantiarum*, and responsible for the disastrous Mexican adventure. Balzac never knew de Morny in all his glory: in 1850 the latter's position was still inconspicuous. M. Joseph Caillaux has been described—in a bitterly hostile book—as “un dandy balzacien,” i.e. a new Morny.

firm, like those of Mr. Ford's, are noted for the surprising excellence of their mechanism, when the price is considered. In addition, Alexandre Dumas Père was the son of Alexandre Dumas Grand-Père, a general in the French army. So, when there was a demand for Napoleonic goods, he was ready with cheap and brilliant articles, in dramatic or narrative form (1831-1839). I am told that, in Spanish garb, they still find a market in South America. The Legend was a better historical romance than even the *Three Musketeers* and *Chicot the Jester*. Its picturesque aspects—both purple and tinsel—delighted the soul of the excellent quadroom who had revived the appropriate title of “Marquis de la Pailleterie.”

It is more surprising to find among the Napoleonists Edgar Quinet, Michelet's friend and fellow pontiff of Romantic democracy at the *Collège de France*. Under the Second Empire he stood by the side of Victor Hugo as the incarnation of the Republican conscience in its protest against Cæsarism; and there is still a group, an honourable and extremely small group, of Free-Thinkers and Free-Believers who revere him as a saint. In his poem *Napoléon* (1836) we find his usual hierophantic attitude: that man spent his very active career expounding the plans of Providence. These plans varied pretty often, but the author never lost his earnestness or his self-assurance. Here we have an ambitious version of the myth concocted in Saint Helena: Napoleon the Prometheus of Democracy.¹ Although he was then thirty-three, Quinet was still groping for his way. He had not discovered, for one thing, that he was not intended by the Fates to be a poet. It may be said that he never ceased groping with the tone of an inspired leader. In his generosity, in his undeniable talent, in his solemn messianic incertitude, Quinet is the prototype of our Roman Rolland: both half-geniuses, half-Protestants, half-democrats, half-prophets, half-artists—whole-hearted halves in all things, guide-posts that never move, and point earnestly in all directions at once.

¹ Quinet was soon to publish a *Prometheus*, 1838.

Wide culture and noble sympathies lead but to failure, when the curse of indecision lies upon them. On the contrary, perfect definiteness within a small field may yield results that the world will not allow to die. Théophile Gautier was but "a man for whom the external world existed," and a faultless jeweller in verse. But it was given to that "mere rhymester" to write the perfect epitome of the Legend. The fifty-two cantos of Quinet's poem are far less effective than Gautier's *cameo*, the Veterans of the Old Guard, *Les Vieux de la Vieille*. That short piece offers a mixture of realism and fancy, of irony and emotion, a swift yet easy transition from grotesqueness to epic grandeur, which are hard to match in French or in any language. The poet chances to meet, on a misty, drizzling December afternoon, five ghosts, five old men, bent and lame, the one parched like a mummy, another ludicrously fat. They wear, as in a masquerade, the ill-fitting, moth-eaten uniforms of the Old Guard. They are survivors of the Grand Army, who celebrate the return of the Emperor's remains. Ludicrous they are, yet infinitely touching: their faded and worn uniforms, their infirmities, their scars, tell a story of heroic adventure such as the world had never known since the days of Alexander. Thus they go, obstinately faithful, to lay their tribute at the foot of the Vendôme Column, as to the altar of their only God:—"Thus laughter is tempered with tears—At sight of this holy Carnival—This masquerade of an Empire—Passing like revellers in the sober dawn—And the Eagle of the Grand Army—Whose soaring fills the Western sky—From a blaze of triumphant flame—Spreads over them its wings of gold." ¹

¹ Ainsi les pleurs trempent le rire
En voyant ce saint carnaval,
Cette mascarade d'empire,
Passer comme un matin de bal.

Et l'aigle de la Grande-Armée,
Dans le ciel qu'emplit son essor,
Du fond d'une gloire enflammée,
Etend sur eux ses ailes d'or.

All the moods and passions of nineteenth-century France were splendidly reverberated by Victor Hugo's work; his soul was indeed, according to his boast, "a sonorous echo." In the course of seventy years the echo repeated many conflicting cries: absurd alone is he who never changes! But Victor Hugo never altered his opinions for selfish motives; he never insulted those whom he once had served, the Bourbons, Louis-Philippe, Napoleon himself; he never claimed against all evidence the consistency of immobility, but was satisfied with the higher consistency of growth. "To rise from a hovel to a palace is a fine thing: finer still it is to rise from error to truth." And his evolution, on the whole, offers nothing disconcerting; it was curiously cautious, even hesitant at times: it went twice, without disaster to his self-respect, through dangerous rapids; it never retraced its course. As a child, Victor Hugo was a Catholic and a Royalist. At eighty-three he died a free member of the Church Universal, and a citizen of the World Republic. In thus passing from the extreme right to the extreme left of political thought, he went through a period of Napoleon-worship. It was not a mood, it was not a pose, but a necessary phase in his development.

Victor Hugo's father was a general in the Imperial armies, and had followed Joseph Bonaparte from Naples to Madrid. Young Victor was educated chiefly under the direction of his mother, a staunch Royalist. So the son of the hero (it goes without saying that every general is a hero, by the same grace that makes every English judge or counsel "learned" and every bishop venerable) was brought up in the devotion of the restored lilies. He worshipped, not Napoleon, but Chateaubriand: and his idol descended from the heights and called him a "sublime child." His first ode on *Bonaparte*, dated March 1822, describes Napoleon as "a despot, the Emperor of a camp," and warns posterity that "these are not the true heroes." At that time, as Maurice Barrès remarked, Victor seems to think more highly of his father-in-law, M. Fouchér, a peaceable employee in

the War Office, than he does of his own father, a much more Romantic figure, who had pursued Fra Diavolo in Calabria and fought the fanatical guerrillas of Spain. In 1823 he began to rediscover his childhood and his father. But he was still too good a Royalist to bow down to Napoleon: the soldiers of France were great, *although* they had to serve a tyrant; and it was through their valour, not through his own genius, that Napoleon achieved prodigies: "Ce chef prodigieux par vous s'est élevé." To the same year belongs an *Ode to the Triumphant Arch*: the monument which destiny did not allow the Emperor to complete was reserved for—the Duke of Angoulême. Well, Victor Hugo was perhaps more than half sincere: he believed in Chateaubriand, who called the military promenade of the Royal Duke "my Spanish war, a gigantic enterprise." And the young man wanted so ardently to find something to praise in his legitimate princes! He had become a sort of junior laureate, and wrote an *Ode on the Death of Louis XVIII*, an *Ode on the Coronation of Charles X*. It would be unworthy to insinuate that the young couple—Victor had married his Adèle in 1822—had scanty resources, and that a royal pension was not unwelcome: "du laurier pour le pot-au-feu."

In 1825 we have a meditation on *The Two Islands*, Corsica and Saint Helena. The poet is interested, respectful, almost reverent: he is on the threshold of the temple. In 1827, another step. In a reception at the Austrian Embassy, the ushers refused to announce Marshals Macdonald, Soult, Mortier, and Oudinot under their ducal titles of Tarento, Dalmatia, Treviso, and Reggio; it must be confessed that these dukedoms *in partibus* have never been taken very seriously even in France. But the marshals withdrew in a huff, and Hugo avenged them with a ringing poem *To the Vendôme Column*. He was still, he thought, an orthodox Royalist: "the four eagles were resting under the shadow of the white flag"; the Bourbons had "adopted the orphaned victories of Napoleon": had not Louis XVIII saved the

Bridge of Jena, which vindictive Blücher wanted to blow up? Still, the pure Legitimists sided naturally enough with their old friend Austria, and the Bonapartists hailed with delight the ode of their former enemy.

Then, in a great poem of *The Orientals*, *Lui* (December 1829), he openly confesses the irresistible fascination of Bonaparte. Whether he be an angel or a demon¹ what matters it? He dominates our age, he is the sun under whose ray the poet becomes melodious like the statue of Memnon: "for evermore Napoleon, dazzling and sombre, stands on the threshold of the century."

The very last days of the Bourbon monarchy saw the "battle" of *Hernani*. In that glorious melodrama—the most incoherent, the most vivid, the most lyrical of his plays—the fourth act represents Charles, King of Spain, awaiting anxiously the news of his election to the Empire. He is at Aix, in the vault which contains the tomb of Charlemagne. He communes with the spirit of the mighty Emperor; he meditates upon the meaning of that supreme monarchy, elective, popular, democratic, Promethean. Such words and such ideas would have greatly puzzled Charles V or Charlemagne: but the Parisian public of 1830 understood, and whenever the actor said: Charlemagne, they heard: Napoleon. In his preface to *Hernani* Victor Hugo quietly asserted: Romanticism is naught but Liberalism in literature. It was true enough at the time, but the Romanticists had taken a full decade in finding it out.

The poet had gone as far as he decently could without disloyalty to the reigning dynasty. Fortunately, Charles X disappeared, and Hugo was released from his allegiance. He, too, felt the intoxicating heat of "the sunshine of July 1830." For ten years he breathed with delight an atmosphere electric with Napoleonism.

His contributions to the Legend were many and varied during this decade. They are found in his four volumes of verse, those collections whose melodious and melancholy

¹ A stock phrase of Romanticism: applied by Lamartine to Byron, by Doña Sol to *Hernani*, etc.

titles are a caress to the French ear: *Les Feuilles d'Automne*, *Les Chants du Crépuscule*, *Les Voix Intérieures*, *Les Rayons et les Ombres*. One piece is a recollection of his childhood: a vision of the Emperor at the Pantheon, remote in the midst of the adoring crowd, impregnably entrenched in his fortress of Olympian calm. Another is "a glimpse cast into a garret": a portrait of the Emperor, and a cross of the Legion of Honour adorn the humble wall, like sacred images on a domestic altar. Then there is a long meditation in which the poet imagines our civilization engulfed in its turn in the torrent of ages: Paris the sleepless is quiet at last. Nothing remains but the towers of Notre Dame, the Vendôme Column, the Triumphal Arch—and the memory of one name. But there are two odes which stand out as the masterpieces of Hugo's Napoleonism, *The Ode to the Column* and *Napoléon II*.¹

Soon after the Revolution of 1830, a petition had been presented, urging that Napoleon's body be brought back to Paris and buried at the foot of the Vendôme Column. The Chamber, afraid, and not without cause, of some political intrigue, refused to be carried by the rush of public sentiment. It was not the business of the poet to follow political caution, so he scathed the petty parliamentarians who trembled at the very ghost of the Emperor. Hugo called himself an "echo": he was too modest. In terms of modern industry, we would call him an "amplifier." No demigod would satisfy him, any more than a demilune would satisfy Mascarille and Jodelet. Napoleon becomes in his verse a full-fledged god, of whom he is the self-appointed priest.

Napoléon II was inspired by the death of the Duke of Reichstadt, the "Eaglet": Hugo felt poignantly the contrast between the beginning of that short life under auspices of unequalled splendour and its fading away, without even the glory of despair, in the dullness of the Austrian Court. Both these odes show Victor Hugo the virtuoso at the height of his power. His rhythm had

¹ Both in *Chants du Crépuscule*.

never been more varied, his imagery more grandiose and more vivid, his rhyme richer in orchestral effects. All that a great subject, a very fair degree of sincerity, and the perfect mastery of a complex, full-toned instrument can yield, will be found in these heroic symphonies. No doubt they are harmonious and impassioned eloquence rather than poetry—variations on a popular theme by a master of technique: a quiet stanza in *The Contemplations*, a weird visionary line in *The Legend of the Centuries*, by comparison, will make them seem obvious and almost vulgar. But the brass band has a legitimate field, although the violin and the organ search our innermost heart.

Victor Hugo explained later his own evolution, under a thin veil of romance, in *Les Misérables*. Marius Pontmercy, like Hugo himself, is the son of a Bonapartist officer. Like Hugo, he is brought up under Royalist influences, and scorns the "bandits of the Loire." He, too, is gradually converted to Liberalism, and, more outspoken than Hugo, he hurls in defiance to his astounded grandfather the fateful words: "Down with the Charter, and that fat pig of a Louis XVIII!" Both young men are unable to come directly to the Republican ideal, pure and simple: they first adopt Napoleon as the champion of the new order, the soldier of the Revolution. Cæsarism, with them, is but a step towards Democracy. Both express their allegiance to Napoleon by reviving the title which the Emperor had granted their fathers. Marius becomes Baron Pontmercy, Victor Viscount, and even Count Hugo. So it was out of sheer democracy that Victor Hugo assumed a coronet, which, by the way, was never officially recognized either in France or in Spain. The explanation is plausible: but it must be confessed that democracy has unexpected twists, or, as the French would say, "Où la démocratie va-t-elle se nicher?"

Perhaps, at the height of his Napoleonism, Victor Hugo was not so clearly conscious of the Republican element in his faith; he may have been thinking rather in terms

of glory and military prestige like Thiers : for he, too, coronet and all, was a man of the people. His first plaything, he said, had been the gold tassel of his father's sword : he may be excused if he preserved in mature years a child's love for the gay accoutrements of war. But his writings at the time leave no doubt as to the sincerity of his liberalism. Just a little ahead of his most advanced contemporaries, ahead perhaps of Lamennais himself, he was a Christian democrat, a lover of the poor, and athirst for social righteousness.

With Victor Hugo, as with most of his contemporaries, the ceremony of December 1840 marked the climax of the Legend. He commemorated that day which he had prophesied,¹ that day of icy sunshine, "as splendid as glory, as cold as the tomb," in a brief poem, and in the rapid, masterly jottings preserved in his *Choses Vues*. His fever was passed. He did not recant : but all had been said that could be said. The God was in his temple : peace be to his ashes ! Napoleonism disappeared almost completely from the upper strata of French literature. It spread underground for eight years and then it welled up again, five million strong, clamouring for a Bonaparte.

IV

What conclusion can we draw from this survey ? One thing is clearly established : Napoleon-worship, non-existent in French literature under the Empire, was by no means unanimous even when the Legend had reached its zenith. Béranger, Thiers, and Stendhal alone were thoroughgoing in their devotion. Balzac was much more guarded. The Napoleonism of Musset and Quinet was only a brief flame. That of Victor Hugo, more durable and incomparably more brilliant, was also a passing phase : fifteen years in a literary career of sixty. On the other hand, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Lamennais, Vigny, Michelet, were resolutely opposed to the idol. These are also names to conjure with.

¹ "Dors ! Nous t'irons chercher ! Ce jour viendra peut-être."

Obviously, no rule of thumb will tell us why such an author was won over by Napoleon's prestige, whilst another remained immune. We can hardly say that the writers of the first group were popular, whilst those of the second appealed only to an élite. Such a distinction would apply admirably to Béranger, Thiers, Dumas, Hugo, as compared with Vigny; but it would be contradicted in the case of Stendhal contrasted with Lamartine. We cannot say that the first group is plebeian, the second aristocratic: for by the side of Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and Vigny, we find among the anti-Napoleonists Michelet, a man of the people. We cannot say that the first group was composed of red-blooded he-men, as behoves wielders and admirers of the Big Stick; Lamartine and Michelet cannot be described as anæmic and flabby. There may be a feminine quality in their soul, but Vigny the stoic is our ideal of a man's man, both energetic and tender.

The shade is hard to define, it is not difficult to feel. There were in Lamartine, Michelet, Vigny, a sensitiveness, a delicacy which were plainly lacking in Thiers, Béranger, Dumas, and even in Stendhal, Balzac, Hugo. Subtle though his psychological analysis may be, Stendhal had the religious ideas of Monsieur Homais—"We need a God for the people, but all priests are rascals or fools"—and the moral ideal of a soldierly Don Juan: "De l'avancement et des femmes." Balzac and Hugo are among the greatest names in the world's literature, greater, in our opinion, than many French critics are willing to admit; and we have frequently been shocked at the superciliousness of a Biré, of a Lasserre, and even of a Lanson, when they deal with the giants. Yet there were in both of them elements of coarseness, of vulgarity, which cannot be overlooked either in their lives or in their works. The modern reader is repelled time and again by their straining after violent effects, their striking of vaticinal attitudes, their meretriciousness. Lives there a *Balzacien* or a *Hugolâtre* bigoted enough to shut his eyes to these faults? They are glaring just because they

are superficial. Our problem is : did Napoleon appeal to the best there was in Balzac and Hugo ? We know full well there was an unrivalled wealth of gold amid so much dross : but was it through the dross or through the gold that they communed with Béranger, Thiers, and Napoleon ?

Chapter IV

DECLINE AND REVIVAL OF THE LEGEND AFTER 1840

I

FROM 1815 TO 1840, it was as the champion of liberalism, the martyr of the Holy Alliance, the Prometheus of Democracy, that Napoleon had been extolled. In 1848, on the contrary, his name was used as the palladium of order. The peasants and the bourgeois of France, equally attached to the sanctity of private property, had been thoroughly frightened by the explosion of socialism among the Parisian working men. Even Béranger was dismayed: "All that was needed was to make the Government come down one step: instead of that, we have flung everything out of the window." And Thiers, the leader of the progressives, had now but a single thought—to check the popular movement at any cost. To make doubly sure, the conservatives appealed both to the material and to the spiritual police, the Army, and the Church. It was as such, as the protector of Order, as the restorer and ally of the Pope, that Louis Napoleon became President (December 10, 1848), Dictator (December 2, 1851), and Emperor (1852).

The effect of these events upon the three major prophets of the Legend was surprising. Apparently they had their wish: yet Béranger went into retirement, Thiers into opposition, Victor Hugo into exile.

Béranger was no genuine democrat, and the high-handed methods of the Government against the Republicans might have left him indifferent. But he was a thorough

going Voltairean. The alliance between Bonapartism and Ultramontane Clericalism disconcerted him—as though the Concordat itself had not been a bid for the support of “the men in black!” So the ageing songster spent the last years of his life aloof, almost openly hostile. The Imperial family cajoled him: the Empress, a devout Catholic, sent him a newly invented invalid’s chair. They refused to believe that he was not an old friend of the household, estranged for fanciful reasons. He shook his head and held his peace. A silent battle was waged over his corpse. It was feared that his funeral might be the occasion for an antidynastic demonstration; so the Government, stealing a march on the Liberals, took charge of the ceremony. Bonapartists and Republicans glared at each other as they followed his hearse; an escort of troops served the double purpose of honouring the poet and overawing his admirers. An ambiguous triumph crowning an equivocal career (1857).

Thiers had been one of the supporters of Louis-Napoleon’s candidacy. He had hoped to be the power behind the presidential throne. He soon found out that his princely protégé, in one respect at least, was a genuine Bonaparte: he had no use—at that time—for journalists, lawyers, and parliamentarians—“all babblers,” as his uncle would have said. After having, through the sedulous efforts of a decade, made the Empire inevitable, Thiers struck a Cassandra-like attitude, and warned his contemporaries: “The Empire is made!” A fine piece of prophecy! He had made it himself. Spurning the sour grapes of political power, Thiers went back to his “beloved studies.” His vast *History of the Consulate and the Empire* was not completed until 1862, and Napoleon III found ironical relish in quoting with praise “the national historian,” who was sulking under his tent.

At first Victor Hugo was not unfavourable to Louis-Napoleon. Soon his relations with the Elysée¹ began to grow cold. It is not necessary to imagine, with the systematic enemies of Victor Hugo, that the poet felt himself

¹ The Presidential residence.

slighted by the Prince-President. The more obvious explanation is that, in a few months, Hugo had moved steadily and fast towards democracy, whilst Louis-Napoleon was the choice of the conservatives, and, it seemed, the tool of the reactionaries. By 1851 Hugo, a hard worker, an able journalist, a laboured but forcible orator, had become one of the most prominent among the Radicals. He had a very fair chance of becoming the actual leader of the party, and its candidate for the Presidency in 1852: his star was ascending as that of Lamartine declined. So when Louis-Napoleon, through a bold "stroke of State," dismissed the Assembly and assumed dictatorial powers, it was natural that Victor Hugo be found in the front rank of those who resisted. He may have exaggerated his share in these events, and heightened their colour: he was a poet, incorrigibly, and a romantic poet. But there is no doubt that his attitude was disinterested and courageous. For eighteen years he was a living protest against the success of "the Crime." Queen Victoria herself might stoop to shaking hands with the blood-stained usurper: Victor Hugo would remain immovable, the last witness, the last martyr, if need be, of a nation's conscience. "If there are but a hundred left, I still defy Sylla; if there are but ten, I shall be the tenth; and if there remains only one, I shall be that one."

An attitude, no doubt, a pose, if you will, but a splendid one. Why should not a poet be artistically conscious of the fine part he is playing, and at the same time perfectly sincere? Hugo's political wisdom is more open to question. Fate has served him well: the Empire fell, and fell ignominiously, as he had prophesied from the first. But the Empire which, in 1870, was trapped into a disastrous war, had become a thoroughly constitutional monarchy, and the responsibility for the conflict does not rest solely upon the sovereign or the regime. Victor Hugo's politics involved a contradiction. The violent overthrow of a Constitution was "glorious" and even "holy" when it was perpetrated by a handful

of Parisian working men. When the same thing was done, at the cost of far fewer lives, by a group of men in authority, it became an unpardonable crime. The 10th of August, 1792, the days of July 1830, and of February 1848 are sacred dates in French history; the Second of December 1851 is a sinister stain. The act of Louis-Napoleon was endorsed by an overwhelming vote of the people; and what is the meaning of democracy, if you refuse to respect the will of the majority? Victor Hugo had come to believe that *Vox Populi* was *Vox Dei* only when it was the echo of his own, and that French democracy had no right to place on her head, if she chose, an imperial crown instead of the orthodox Phrygian cap. The Republic was in his eyes not a piece of political machinery, but an end in itself, an idea, against which even democracy should not prevail. Who could charge him with inconsistency? His curious state of mind is universal to-day among French Republicans and Irish Irreconcilables; it has existed in America ever since the inception of that country's national existence. Republicanism is a faith, not a mere intellectual conviction. But this view was particularly strange in a man who, four years previously, had been satisfied to sit as a Peer of the Realm in a monarchy based upon class privilege. His conversion had been surprisingly thorough as well as rapid: at any rate, it was to prove lasting.

So the new Pontiff of Democracy was hurling his anathema at Bonapartism and all its works. But what was he going to do with his own past? He managed, in *Les Misérables*, to explain it as a stage in his growth: his Napoleon-worship was but the chrysalis of his Republicanism. The process could not be reversed: his wings were spread, and he could not get into his own larva again. But his favourite method of harmonizing yesterday with to-day is indicated in the very title of his virulent satire *Napoleon the Little*. Uncle and nephew had but the name in common: Hugo admired the one, who was admirable, and despised the other, who was despicable: there is no contradiction in that.

In this manner he deftly turned all his past eulogies of the first Emperor into the most biting satire of the second. This he did to perfection in his poem *Expiation*, a complete epic cycle in miniature. The first episode is the retreat from Moscow, with its tragic refrain: "It was snowing, ceaselessly snowing." We see that immense horde of dead, dying, and ghosts implacably buried under the Russian snow; and Napoleon, whose dreams of world empire lie under the same pall, feeling the hand of Fate heavy on his shoulder, questions: "Is that the punishment?" "Not yet," says the avenging angel. Then Waterloo, the rout of the giants; and again the Emperor asks: "Am I punished enough?" And the Voice answers, "No." Saint Helena! Exile, protracted agony, lonely sorrows: is not that sufficient expiation? Not yet. But, thirty years later, the Emperor awakes under the dome of the Invalides, and the Angel shows him a vision of horror. A swarm of pigmies, half-monkeys and more than half-roguers, are trafficking with his name. A dull-eyed, middle-aged adventurer assumes his name and title, is decking himself with imperial mantle, sceptre, and crown. A pack of sharpers are crowding the steps of the restored throne—all under the protection of Napoleon the Great. This tragic parody, this sacrilegious farce, this imperial swindle, this, and not Moscow, Waterloo, Saint Helena, is the true punishment: the epic ends in a sordid carnival. But what is the crime for which Napoleon is tortured with such exquisite cruelty? Then the Emperor reads in letters of fire the fateful date of his *coup d'état*: the 18th of Brumaire. Victor Hugo had not discovered that the 18th of Brumaire was a crime until the 2nd of December 1851 rather rudely opened his eyes: better late than never. It is the eternal Joseph Prudhomme fallacy: Napoleon is wholly admirable—except for his ambition—which is the whole man. In other terms, "had he remained a mere lieutenant of artillery, he would still be on the throne." It is such reasonings as this that half-justify the cruel jibe of Hugo's enemies: "A raving National Guard."

A poet needs legends as imperiously as a scientist needs facts. No sooner had Victor Hugo turned his back on one idol than he must needs fall on his knees and worship another. This time it was the Revolution. He began exalting the Soldiers of the Year Two, the victorious hosts of Carnot, tattered, unshod, singing the "Marseillaise," capable of scaling the very heavens, if, turning their eyes round in their Olympic race, they had seen behind them the Great Republic pointing upwards. His epic imagination found full scope in the glorification of the Convention, the very summit of human history: "there is Himalaya, and there is the Convention."¹

It was not only in the mind of Victor Hugo that the Second Empire almost blotted out the memories of the first. It is unwise to bring a Legend down to earth: the chivalrous Legitimism of the Romantic poets could not indefinitely endure the sight of Louis XVIII, that obese ghost. The Imperial Eagle, the crown, the sceptre, the blue mantle strewn with golden bees—all these heroic properties looked very well in the magic haze of the past. In the cruel daylight of a critical age they lost their charm, like Gautier's belated revellers in the sober dawn. The reader will remember that, according to a persistent story, Louis-Napoleon landed at Boulogne with a tame eagle, which was to hover above his head, attracted by a bit of bacon concealed in the historic cocked hat. The friends of the Pretender have confessed to the eagle, with the extenuating circumstance that it was a vulture: but they stoutly denied the bacon. This ludicrous episode is an apt symbol of the merciless cultivation of the Legend by official Bonapartism; it made even loyal supporters of the regime sick at heart. Napoleon III was welcomed by a surprising number of intelligent and independent men, and he was quietly accepted by many more, such as Taine and Renan. But the laureates of his reign, the writers of cantatas to order, are even more inane than

¹ As a matter of fact, the present Bourgeois Republic, brought up on Victor Hugo, has seen fit to place a monument to the Convention on the very altar of the national Pantheon: a chapter of *Ninety-Three*, a stanza of *Les Châtiments* in marble—or is it plaster?

those of the first Empire: Brifaut outshines Belmontet. To praise Napoleon I under his nephew's reign—especially whilst the patriarch of French letters was in exile—would have seemed to self-respecting writers a degrading show of servility. Sainte-Beuve, it is true, flattered the dynasty: but Sainte-Beuve was admired and feared rather than respected, and he did not recover his popularity until, on the issue of clericalism, he had joined the opposition.

The enemies of the regime—Legitimists, Orleanists, Republicans—united in constant criticism of the Legend. The Academy showed its temper by electing Auguste Barbier, who, nearly forty years previously, had made such a lyric onslaught on *The Idol*. Charras, Scherer, even Quinet, denounced the nefarious influence of the first Bonaparte. The most typical works of that period were those of Barni and Lanfrey. Barni gave at Geneva a course of lectures on *Napoleon and his Historian, M. Thiers*, which appeared in book form in 1865. He attacked the delusion which Liberals like Thiers, and even Republicans, had cherished so long: that, if Napoleon went astray in his imperial ambition, the beginning and the end of his career were sufficiently pure to redeem his errors in the eyes of posterity. Under the Consulate he had saved the Revolution; during the Hundred Days he had become genuinely converted to democracy. Barni had little trouble in showing that it is a fallacy to separate the Consulate from the Empire, and the Empire from the Hundred Days: Napoleon was essentially the same in all three periods—a military despot. A dictatorship established by force and fraud could never “save” liberty and equality under the law: and Napoleon's belated liberalism, very ambiguous during the Hundred Days, was at Saint Helena merely a clever political pretence.

Barni had not attempted to write a life of Napoleon: he had contented himself with a searching criticism of Thiers's monumental and popular work. Lanfrey undertook the larger task: he began publishing in 1867 his

long, minute, bitterly hostile narrative. Lanfrey is not a great historian : he was sustained neither by the naïve sympathy which inspired Thiers, nor by the fierce indignation that Michelet, at the height of his powers, would have shown. His book was so evidently a piece of polemical literature that, after the downfall of Napoleon III, the author did not care to complete it, and turned his activity into political channels. France was sick of the Legend ; but she had no taste for a counter-legend of systematic disparagement.

II

The decade that followed Sedan marked the low ebb of Napoleonism. The first Legend, born in Italy, grown in Egypt, had waned even before the Russian fiasco. The second, born during the Hundred Days, grown in Saint Helena, transplanted and fostered by Béranger, Thiers, Hugo, Louis-Philippe, and Louis-Napoleon, had begun paling after 1840, and hardly a trace of it was left in 1870. The age was practical : the legend is a romance. The Legend appeals to bellicose emotions : France was surfeited with militarism. Yet there was to be a third out-cropping—in all likelihood not the last.

It grew in the eighties, and flourished until about 1900. The first reason for this new lease of life was the eclipse of Bonapartism as a political danger. Napoleon III, prematurely senile, died in 1873 ; the Prince Imperial perished in Zululand ; the shattered battalions of the Imperialists were further divided by the feud between Prince Napoleon (Plonplon) and his son Victor. In 1814 Marshal Soult and Wellington fought an indecisive battle near Toulouse. A quarter of a century later, as the Marshal had attained a prominent place in the political personnel of Louis-Philippe, it was said : “ When Soult is in power, people say he has lost the battle of Toulouse ; when he is out of office, he has won it.” In the same way, when Bonapartism is in the ascendant, Napoleonism is going down, and vice versa. French literature was

almost entirely free from Napoleon-worship under both Empires. The Legend flared up again at a time when the cause of Louis-Napoleon and Victor seemed absolutely hopeless.

In another respect the Presidency of Grévy resembled the reign of Louis-Philippe. In both cases we had a bourgeois regime which could neither forget nor revive the military glories of the nation. The France of 1830 was chafing under the memories of Waterloo and the Treaties of Vienna; the France of 1880 suffered more keenly still from the humiliation of Sedan and Frankfort. Whilst national pride was urging an aggressive policy, wisdom was calling for peace. Louis-Philippe had made it the chief end of his rule to wean the country, by imperceptible steps, from its dreams of revenge and supremacy. In the eighties France had again to face the same problem, and again she chose peace. Not without qualms: the wound was unhealed. France was not simply hurt in her pride: she was suffering from a sense of intolerable injustice. Like many people who have known better days, she sought comfort in her splendid past. What was more appropriate than the story of the conqueror who had held Germany under his boot, who had distributed German titles and German estates to hungry German princelings, who had kept waiting in his antechamber a crowd of royal German lackeys?

Napoleonism is a symptom of national discouragement. When France is bored, when she has lost faith in herself, she finds solace in the memory of that grand adventure. Oh! to forget that insignificant, pettifogging, niggardly Grévy, and his son-in-law who sold the Legion of Honour over the counter! To forget Panama, the incompetence and dishonesty of promoters and contractors, the wholesale bribery of Press and Parliament! To forget that vital statistics pitilessly registered every year a worse Sedan, and that the mourning figures of Alsace and Lorraine were receding beyond recall, their wistfulness slowly changing to stolid resignation! A draught of Napoleonism could drive away these sombre thoughts.

When France became herself again, soon after 1900, when the Triple Entente, the expansion of her oversea dominions, and her solid material prosperity had restored her self-confidence, she no longer needed that dangerous stimulant, and the Napoleonic star grew dim once more.

This state of mind created a favourable public for Napoleonic literature. And it so happened that, just at that time, the dead began to speak. Innumerable Memoirs, many of them spurious, others boldly reworked by unscrupulous heirs and needy hack writers, had appeared between 1821 and 1840. But many others had been kept under lock and key, until their publication could no longer give offence. The French are very conservative in these matters. The Diplomatic Archives are still withheld from investigators for the years following 1848, and the Goncourt Academy recoils from publishing the last instalment of its founders' famous diary, for fear of the innumerable libel suits that might ensue. This partly explains why so many important documents had to wait until 1880 before they saw the light. The Memoirs of Madame de Rémusat, which started the movement, were particularly entertaining and successful. Between 1885 and 1895 there was an avalanche of publications: Captain Coignet, a modest *Grognard*; Marbot, Macdonald, Mollien, Chaptal, Pasquier, Roederer, Talleyrand (whose Memoirs, expected with the keenest curiosity, were profoundly disappointing); even Constant, Napoleon's valet, and Rustan, his faithful Mameluke.

This wealth of new material, with important contributions from foreign sources, transformed the field of Napoleon scholarship. Evidently neither Thiers nor Lanfrey had said the final word on that prodigious career. A whole school of historians devoted themselves to the task. Many details seem now established with scientific accuracy. Are we nearer the goal—an objective, incontrovertible appraisal of Napoleon and his work? We cannot say, and we dare not hope. The most careful historians are merely those who weave their prejudices on a scientific loom.

Taine opened the way, and his influence was profound. But, on account of his age, of his purpose, of his method, and of his genius, he stands apart from those who followed him. After the disasters of 1870 and 1871, he sought to diagnose, and thereby help to overcome, the diseases of the body politic which had brought France so near destruction. His vast work, *The Origins of Contemporary France*, is not therefore a piece of disinterested research: it is a "consultation" given at the bedside of a beloved patient. Taine may claim repeatedly that he is only a "naturalist," moved by the sole love of truth: he is seeking *a* truth that will cure. Nay, he is not seeking: he is giving historical justification for his prescription. In Taine the patriot and the artist are infinitely superior to the scholar.

His volumes on *The Ancient Regime* and *The Revolution* offered a crescendo of horrors. Taine's nature, under its varnish of Latin logic, had no Latin cheerfulness. His imagination had always been systematically sombre; and the events of 1871, combined with the approach of old age, made it darker still. When he came to Napoleon, he was puzzled. His book was a political consultation, and his conscious ideal in politics was liberalism. England was then at the height of her influence; Taine was one of the chief channels through which English ideas penetrated into France, and his masters were Adam Smith, Macaulay, Stuart Mill. As a liberal, he detested Bonaparte and all his works. He ascribed to the spirit of state control, enforced uniformity, universal centralization, the decline which he detected in the political life of France. The body anæmic, the head hypertrophied, such was his diagnosis of that morbid condition, and the Napoleonic system was in great part responsible for it. As a scientist, he had little use for those methods of oppressive mediocrity: the plebiscite, the bureaucracy, the army. Yes: but there was another side to Taine. Hard as he tried to be English, very English, more English than the English themselves, he was at heart a French *petit bourgeois*, not so much interested in liberty as in

order at any price. As soon as he had found a tolerable niche therein, he had accepted the Second Empire. The explosion of—shall we say Bolshevism or Romanticism?—the Paris Commune frightened him into the arms of the Great Policeman that would protect Property. So he could not help being secretly indulgent to the men who, roughly, at a heavy cost, but efficiently, had “replaced the social pyramid on its base,” and checked the Revolutionary spirit. The Great and Glorious Revolution, 1789 as well as 1793, the Constituent Assembly as well as the Reign of Terror, were in Taine’s mind the embodiment of all evil. Nothing could be found about Soviet Russia in the files of the most reactionary French paper that has not been anticipated by Taine in the treatment of the very Revolution which Hugo and Michelet worshipped as holy: history and journalism are but the projections of our fears and hopes upon a neutral screen of facts. We cannot therefore expect Taine to blame Napoleon overmuch for “closing the era of revolutions,” even though liberty was crushed nearly to death in the process. So this book, imperious and passionate though it be, is a constant and perplexing Yea and Nay.

This impression of inner contradiction is enhanced by the effective but distorting method of presentation. Taine, who rather despised Victor Hugo, had come to use the same violent contrasts as the poet. He loved to marshal his facts under a few logical heads. In each division he piled them up without qualification, bent only upon producing a massive and irresistible effect. He was as wilfully one-sided as Renan was cautious, subtle, and rich in dissolving shades. He trusted that another one-sidedness would later restore the balance. When he tells us of Napoleon’s selfishness and cold cruelty, he out-Lanfreys Lanfrey: but it is only a preparation for out-Thiersing Thiers when it comes to the Emperor’s executive genius. Napoleon, he said, had always present in his mind’s eye three enormous registers upon which were consigned every bit of information about military

topography, administration, and contemporary biography. Not only could he point his finger upon any single line in these mental records, but he could also embrace the analytical summaries and the general conclusions of their multitudinous details. The whole history of fifteen years is boldly summed up in the psychology of one transcendent character: and that character is at times a fiend, at times a demigod, never a man. This monumental accumulation of marvellously lucid paragraphs does not form an intelligible picture.

Yet Taine was craving for unity of effect. He could not achieve it through a patient, unsystematic succession of fine and accurate touches, as was the method of Sainte-Beuve: he sought it through simpler and more forcible means. He attempted to give the "formula" in which all the traits of a character are implied in the same way as all the geometrical properties of a triangle are contained in its definition. This theory haunted him from the very beginning of his career: it had inspired his *Essay on Livy*. His Bonaparte is not a Frenchman of the eighteenth century, but an Italian of the Renaissance. "Nowhere," said Alfieri, "does the human plant grow so vigorously as in Italy," and at no time, adds Taine, did it grow even there as it did from 1300 to 1500, from the contemporaries of Dante to those of Michael Angelo, Cæsar Borgia, Julius II, and Machiavelli.

Here Taine is quoting Stendhal, for whom his admiration knew no bounds. We find in his correspondence that he made it a rule to read over the complete works of Stendhal once every year, as Ruskin, in his youth, read his Bible. The idea of Napoleon as a belated brother of the great *condottieri* was one of the elements in Stendhal's devotion to his hero. But Stendhal, an eye-witness, and less one-sided than Taine, was not blind to the other side of that strange character: his inborn congruency with the commonplace. Taine, as usual, labours his point overmuch: yet the passages on Napoleon as a Malatesta, a Castruccio Castracani astray in modern France, are among the best in his book. Both his psychology

and his philosophy of art made him an admirer of the ruthless strength, the *virtù*, displayed by Italian heroes or ruffians. Like Stendhal, like Balzac, he admired energy, even criminal energy. We find in odd places, in his *Voyage to the Pyrenees*, in his *Thomas Graindorge*, scenes of violence related with ironic calm and unmistakable relish. The quiet little professor, stooping and bespectacled, whose life was the model of all bourgeois virtues, felt a romantic attraction for splendid monsters: shall we call it a sign of suppressed desires? As an æsthete, he is fascinated; as a moralist, he shudders; and the reader is more hopelessly nonplussed than ever.

We know for certain that this confusion existed in the minds of Taine's contemporaries. The critics literally did not know what to make out of the book. Maurice Barrès was an admirer of Taine: there is a beautiful chapter in *The Uprooted* in which he shows a young man listening reverently to the talk of the Master. But Barrès is likewise a Napoleon-worshipper, and in all probability he borrowed from Taine himself the idea of "Napoleon as a Professor of Energy." On the other hand, the Imperialists were indignant beyond measure. Prince Napoleon and Princess Mathilde severed all relations with the blasphemer. Taine felt deeply the loss of their friendship, for these two were the most brilliant and the most liberal of the Bonapartes.¹

Taine was a political philosopher rather than a historian: but historians could not escape his influence. About 1890 he and Renan were the unquestioned sovereigns of French thought. Even in the work of professional scholars we can easily detect traces of *Tainism*: a combination of logic and picturesqueness, general ideas supported by an array of concrete, significant facts, abstract formulæ alternating with bold images. Taine's famous "crocodile," for instance, the symbol of Jacobinism, has proved a very prolific beast. Louis Madelin's *French Revolution*, which received a prize from

¹ Prince Napoleon attempted to refute Taine in his book *Napoleon and His Critics*.

the French Academy, is nought but a scholarly abridgement and revision of Taine's, with a fuller treatment of military affairs. Taine remains a power which we must resist but cannot ignore.

The Napoleonic literature of that period is not only impressive in bulk, but of very high merit: the French historical school fears no comparison in point of accuracy, fine temper, lucidity, and charm. It will be sufficient to mention, without any attempt at completeness, and without any appraisal, the works of Chuquet, Welschinger, Lanzaac de Laborie, Henri Houssaye, Albert Vandal. Sorel's masterly study of *Europe and the French Revolution* is the most illuminating of them all. He showed that no single man can perceptibly hasten, divert, or stem the vast stream of a nation's fate. The reader of Sorel will not be inclined to make Napoleon's ambition exclusively responsible for the wars of his reign: the imperialism which ran its inevitable course to Waterloo was implied in the Treaties of Basel, as early as 1795. But neither will he think of Napoleon in the terms of the Legend, as the demigod whose single will was pitted against the forces of all Europe: the Bonaparte of Sorel was the tool, or the plaything, of circumstances that Talleyrand, for one, understood more clearly than he.

The name which is most indissolubly connected with the development of Napoleon research is that of Frédéric Masson—"le Grand Frédéric." He may be the only man who has had the courage of reading every bit of gossip about Napoleon, every tittle of evidence, every chance mention in private letters, every bill submitted by a tradesman. His twenty odd volumes form, not a connected history, but a matchless collection of microscopic slides, prepared with the loving patience of the devotee and the skill of the technician. We may add that the artist in Masson was of no mean order: uncouth at times, but constantly alive, and of vigorous, personal charm. He was long considered as a mere gleaner of anecdotes: but his perseverance won him full recognition as a historian and a seat in the Academy. No single picture stands forth

out of his several thousand pages: the reader can fit in those minute facts with any conception of Napoleon he may happen to bring with him. For the family of the Emperor, and for several of his grand dignitaries, the narrative was rather damaging: Masson was absolutely fearless in his use of documents, and there were few Bonapartist families that did not dread rather than encourage his investigations. The fact that these studies found a ready public is perhaps the best evidence of the Corsican's imperishable prestige. Is there any man now living about whom our great-grandchildren will care to know how long he wore a pair of shoes?

III

Memoirs and histories were not the only way in which the Napoleonic revival manifested itself. For a few seasons at least it pervaded Parisian life and literature. There was a craze for the Empire style in dress and interior decoration. We may feel that a Roman pastiche with Egyptian influences is out of place in the modern world, and that Empire furniture is heavily uncomfortable: still, the total impression is one of stiff dignity which is not unwelcome, especially after the vogue of Japanese flimsiness. At any rate, the Empire provided France with the last definite style in her history; since that period our taste has been antiquarian or exotic, but mostly nondescript.¹

Napoleonism invaded popular literature, and particularly the drama. It even scaled the sacred heights of Montmartre: the Cabaret du Chat Noir offered a life of Napoleon in Chinese silhouettes, with a poem by Georges Fragerolle. Between 1890 and 1900 there was hardly any time when some Napoleon was not strutting on the stage: we were almost brought back to the early days of the July Monarchy, when every theatre and even

¹ This applies strictly to decorative art. In the major arts, architecture, sculpture, painting, the First Empire does not rank so high—perhaps not even so high as the Second.

the circus must have its Napoleon. We remember with some distinctness a play of that type, *Plus que Reine*, by Emile Bergerat—chiefly because the great comedian Coquelin, an incomparable Cyrano, was such an unconvincing First Consul and Emperor. We shall single out two samples only which seem to be of more permanent value.

The first is *Madame Sans-Gêne*, by Victorien Sardou and Emile Moreau (1893). Sardou was admirably qualified for the work. He was a master craftsman, always ready to meet the demands of the public or of a popular actor; he wrote *Theodora*, *La Tosca*, *Gismonda*, for Sarah Bernhardt, and went into the export trade when Sir Henry Irving wanted a *Robespierre* or a *Dante*. His heart was in this particular work, for he was a Bonapartist, and this Napoleonic play is probably the least insincere as well as the cleverest of his innumerable dramas. Finally, history was his hobby; he was something of a scholar, on the anecdotal scale, and a successful collector. To his matchless skill, to his native interest in the period, he joined a fund of first-hand information, so far at least as costumes and customs were concerned.

He had the good sense not to attempt an epic drama, but to remain within his own sphere of picturesque comedy. He pounced upon the most amusing aspect of the Imperial Court: the contrast, which we have already noted, between the resplendent titles of the *parvenu* nobility and their utter lack of social training. The wife of Marshal Lefebvre, Duke of Danzig, was a worthy laundress, who, unabashed by the magnificence of her new surroundings, preserved the ready wit of the Parisian working girl. She alone, loud, vulgar, but kindly, energetic, and sensible, dared to face the Master. Napoleon thought she was "impossible," and wanted Lefebvre to divorce her; but, in spite of a scene with the Emperor's sisters, she managed to save her position, and her married happiness. The character is delightful, and proved the greatest triumph in the career of Réjane. On reading the play again after many years, we were impressed

with its moderation. There is a halo cast about the whole period, no doubt, but Napoleon himself is not idealized. He relapses into the Corsican dialect, when his sisters begin quarrelling about precedence: for a moment the Emperor drops out of sight, and we see the Bonapartes as a family of foreign adventurers. He is jealous of Neipperg (oh! his prophetic soul!), and the jealous husband is seldom a hero on the French stage. He is outwitted at every turn. Our sympathies go out to Madame Sans-Gêne; but she, too, is helpless in the hands of the man who knows all the secret wires: the inevitable Fouché.

The other drama is much more ambitious, too ambitious perhaps; but is not its very essence the tragedy of disproportionate ambition? It is *L'Aiglon*, by Edmund Rostand. In strict history the play is without foundation. The Duke of Reichstadt, far from dreaming of a liberal Bonapartist restoration, was a correct Habsburg prince. On the battlefield of Wagram he said: "Here we were, there the enemy"—the enemy being his own father. Rostand was too well informed to entertain any doubt on that point; but he claimed the privilege of the poet, the sovereign power of creating an artistic truth truer than reality itself. "Let a mere scribbler search, scratch, investigate! Even when he is wrong, the poet is right. . . . Sleep! It is not always the Legend that tells lies: a dream may be less deceptive than a document. Sleep! Thou wert such a youth and such a son, whatever they may say."

But whilst the main point is fanciful, the details, the episodes, are as wonderfully vivid and accurate as in *Cyrano*. The atmosphere of Napoleon-worship which prevailed in France and over a great part of Europe in 1831 is reconstituted with glowing sympathy, and at the same time with minute fidelity: Rostand has not scorned the assistance of the "mere scribblers, who search, scratch, investigate." The symbolical figure of Flambeau the "groggnard" is a trifle obvious and conventional, but only in the measure to be expected in a

popular drama ; and if the epic evocation of the Wagram battlefield is somewhat strained, no one will dispute its effectiveness. Yet the play as a whole is not so successful as *Cyrano* : the artificial tone, the acrobatic wit, the exaggerated heroism and braggadoccio, which were so admirably in keeping with the period of the earlier play, jar on our taste in a Viennese setting. *Cyrano* is served by its very faults. *L'Aiglon* is uneven and disappointing.

However, the chief interest of the drama does not lie in its historical colouring or in its over-loaded cleverness. *Hamlet* should not be judged as a picture of conditions at the Court of Denmark, and *L'Aiglon* is a *Hamlet*. The son of Napoleon also is a young man upon whom fate has thrust a terrible responsibility : weakened by self-analysis, he doubts his own fitness, and perishes under the burden. The kinship between *Hamlet* and *L'Aiglon* is made more palpable when we remember that, in 1896, Sarah Bernhardt played with great success *Lorenzaccio*, a fine Romantic rendering of the same theme by Alfred de Musset. In 1899 she gave *Hamlet*, and it was she who, in 1900, interpreted the Duke of Reichstadt.

It is not too far-fetched to seek in *L'Aiglon* the tragedy, not of the King of Rome alone, but of France at the end of the nineteenth century, that "fin-de-siècle" France just emerging from a long fever of self-depreciation and its attendant Napoleonism. France as a nation had to face the responsibility of retrieving her fame, obscured by the disasters of 1871 and the political chaos that followed ; and she felt unequal to the task. The Duke of Reichstadt looks at himself in a mirror, and, shuddering, he feels in himself the Austrian taint. The destiny to which he is heir is too great for him : he is sick, he is weary, the scion of a frivolous, worn-out race. Well might the patriots of 1900, after the orgy of "decadentism" in literature, the scandals of the Dreyfus Case, the humiliation of Fashoda, despair, for a moment, of their country. She was the heir of a unique tradition, but her mirror would reveal to her, in some features, the flabby selfishness of

the bourgeois, the blasé cynicism of the Paris boulevardier, the half insane twitch of the anarchist. The France that had ruled Europe through the prestige of her culture, the generosity of her ideal, or the might of her armies, was in her grave: the new France was like the Eaglet, whose wings fluttered but a moment, only to be bruised against the bars of fate, and folded silently in resignation and death.

May we not see in this dramatic poem the symbol of Rostand's own career? He, too, had his Hamlet problem. The world-wide success of *Cyrano* had made him the young Napoleon of French letters: Emile Faguet had wept for joy and sung *Nunc dimittis*. Yet Rostand was too keen a critic not to know that he was no Victor Hugo—only a miraculously clever punster in rhyme, a peerless juggler with coruscating words, a greater master of upholstery and bric-à-brac than Sardou, a defter manipulator of intricate plots than Scribe. He was overawed by his own fame. Let us add that he was suffering from lack of physical robustness. So he hardly dared to risk another battle. It took him ten years to complete his *Chantecler*, which was coldly received; and he survived, strangely silent, for nearly another decade—survived long enough, alas! to publish the most insipid, the most inanely clever poems inspired by the world war. He may, in 1899, have looked in his mirror, and felt, in his excessive delicacy and elegance, in the sparkle of his Southern eyes, that the author of *Cyrano* could also write *The Flight of the Marseillaise*. He could have been a happy sparrow: he chose, or was fated, to be a wounded Eaglet.

It is not our purpose to pass in review the serried battalions of Napoleonic literature. We shall only pick out here and there a book which offers an unusual degree of power and charm. The chapter in *The Uprooted* in which a group of ardent young men gather, on May 5, 1884, before the tomb of their hero, is, like all the writings of Barrès, a peculiar blend of Romantic fever and searching analysis; it is written in a style of puzzling

rhythm, full of deliberate and effective discords, like a page of Debussy. We should like to dwell on *The Soul of Napoleon*, by Léon Bloy, the most virulent, eccentric, untameable of Catholic mystics. A poet's eyes are ever *new*: the old stereotyped phrase, "Napoleon was the instrument of Providence," leaped before Léon Bloy like a flame, revealing "the face of God in the darkness." Strangely enough, this most extreme of Napoleon-worshippers meets, at the antipodes of popular thought, the materialistic historian. Whilst the majority agree in extolling the *will* of Napoleon, mystic and materialist alike see him driven he knew not whither: flotsam on a sea of circumstances, or God's passive agent, as you please, but never the master of his fate.

It is unsafe to speak of consistency—a Philistine virtue—in the thought of Anatole France: for that exquisite sceptic can be ardent, and even fanatical. Would it be more surprising to see Sylvestre Bonnard admire Napoleon than to see Abbé Jérôme Coignard endorse the Third International? But, although he looked at one time like a cavalry officer, and had friends in Bonapartist society, Anatole France seems never to have worshipped the idol. In *Penguin Island* he gives a bitterly sarcastic survey of French history, and his sharpest satire falls on the admirers of *Trinco*. Trinco conquered half the world, lost more, and left the country ruined and mutilated, like the limbs of the devoted Penguins his followers: but he gave them glory, for which no price could be too high.

Napoleon's centennial in 1921 brought forth a crop of Napoleonic literature. Some of the popular histories which were marketed on that occasion were carefully written and profusely illustrated: Lacour-Gayet's is an excellent example.¹ The magazines were full of articles

¹ *Le Consulat et l'Empire*, by G. Pariset, vol. iii of Lavissee's *Histoire de France Contemporaine*, although published in 1921, does not belong to centennial literature. It is the clearest, sanest, and most readable of the briefer surveys. Diplomatic and military affairs, however, are unduly compressed, as belonging to European rather than to French history.

signed by authoritative names: M. Paul Bourget, in *L'Illustration*, found in his very admiration for the Emperor an argument in favour of the Duke of Orleans. He took as his text the reflection of Napoleon after Waterloo: "If I had been my own son instead of myself, I might still have had a chance." Authority finds no safe basis in the success of a single man: for fate is treacherous, and the greatest genius will trip. Authority is a plant of slow growth: before it can be said to be established, it must have become the unconscious habit of generations. That is why France, since the Revolution, is in a state of anarchy. That is why, the apostle of Tradition tells us with the utmost gravity, we must tear up the roots which the Republic has grown during the last fifty years, and plant again the old dynastic trunk which, in 1830, fell almost without a blow, so complete was its inner decay.

Our sincere appreciation for Elie Faure as a historian of art compelled us to read his *Napoleon* (1921) with seriousness. From a lesser man the book would be summarily dismissed as naïve. In style, at any rate, it is curiously antiquated; it reminds us of Quinet in his most sybilline moods. Two chapter heads, "Jesus and He," "Prometheus," will give an adumbration of these post-Romantic sublimities. In spirit, it is an odd compound of Nietzsche and Béranger. Napoleon is praised as the poet of Energy *per se*, beyond good and evil; but he is also presented as kind, loving, indulgent, sorry when he had given offence, a good Frenchman, and a better democrat—why not say at once "the best of Republics," like Louis-Philippe? A dangerous element in this chaotic book is the apology of force: "Struggle is noble simply because it is a struggle. . . . It renders legitimate the accession to triumphant life of a victorious element against the conquered element. . . . Human Right is but a habit, but Divine Right is Force in the making." Back of these cryptic utterances we recognize the purest Prussianism, the worship of Might—hardly the philosophy that will help *post bellum* France recover the integrity

of her soul. And we are bound to notice that in French, that language of supreme clarity, it seems difficult to distinguish Law from Right, or Strength from Force.

Without any prejudice against contemporary writers, it may be said that the Napoleonic field, of late, has yielded no new treasure. Is it showing signs of exhaustion? Frankly, we believe it; but we do not forget how cautious we should be in such matters. About 1840 it seemed as though all had been said on the subject; yet, half a century later, in the nineties, Napoleonism was almost as prolific as it had ever been. Saint-Simon was forty in 1715, when Louis XIV died. Who could imagine that this Duke and Peer, who made himself so thoroughly ridiculous by his passion for the minutiae of etiquette, would, in 1830, come to light again as the most intense, the most vivid, of all French memorialists? May not 1930 bring forth such a masterpiece by some neglected minister, general, or courtier of Napoleon? Even if the prestige of Napoleon should gradually wane, as steadily as the favour of the Middle Ages declined two generations ago, still we might expect an uneven yet constant stream of Napoleonic literature, just as each season brings forth a few mediæval romances. So long as children keep playing soldiers, and young men dream of conquering the world, there will be a market for the Napoleon Saga.

LAST REFLECTIONS:
THE HERO OF THE WILL

I

THANKS TO the labours of innumerable Massons, we may know sometime what the man Napoleon Bonaparte did and said, ate and wore, day after day, for the fifty-two crowded years of his earthly life. All lies will be brushed aside. Facts, verified facts, will stand alone in their minuteness and in their integrity. And then? Will the final word be spoken, and shall we know the true Napoleon at last?

The true Napoleon! The question is no sooner framed than the inadequacy of mere facts appears glaringly. For life, in Napoleon's time, was not a static accumulation of definite elements which could be isolated, labelled, and numbered. It was what it is to-day, a welter of blind forces, passions more than half blind, and antagonistic purposes, all moving, struggling, absorbing and absorbed, reacting upon one another, inextricably. If we were to reproduce the whole Napoleonic period in all its details, we should have to include all its conflicts and all its uncertainties. If we could reconstitute the mind of Napoleon himself, it would have to be, not a neat museum show-case, but an ever-shifting battlefield, with enemy forces surmised rather than discovered, with ignorances, impulses, and doubts ever breaking from the ranks. Napoleon could never have spoken the "final word" about himself, for such a final word would henceforth be a new departure, another link in an endless chain of character building. We may claim that, at the end of a century, much has come to light of which he was not even obscurely conscious, so that we are able to know him better than he knew himself. But, then, should we not consider also that with our added experi-

ence we are introducing the germs of new perplexities? An interpreter of Napoleon explains Napoleon, after a fashion. But the interpreter remains to be explained; and, as in *The Critic*, he may be the harder to understand of the two.

It is obvious, therefore, that erudition will never settle our problem. We are swept across an uncharted sea, and the pitiful lamp of our erudition merely reveals the puzzled faces of our fellow travellers. The most reliable investigators of details may be naïvely uncritical in their general opinions. They have trained themselves to establish definite facts beyond peradventure: but they cannot get rid of their personal equation. Their selection and their grouping of the facts inevitably depend upon their conception of what is worth while in history: for who takes the trouble of relating the irrelevant? In other terms, their scholarship is the diligent handmaiden of a theory, a passion, or a faith.

The Napoleonic Legend is entirely founded upon such a philosophy of history, the most obvious of all, the one which interprets the course of human events in terms of the individual will. We are conscious of purposes in ourselves. To a limited extent, we manage to carry out some of our purposes. This measure of success, modest though it be, constitutes our "career," if not our life. What could be more natural than to imagine the reorganization of France and her supremacy in Europe as Napoleon's conscious purposes, since they were his achievements? His life, and the whole history of his time, are thus turned into the drama of a Will: aspiring, all but attaining, thwarted at last, yet indomitable.

If this interpretation of history be valid, then the fascination of Napoleon needs no further explanation, for there never was a more triumphant display of will power. Birth, physique, education, taste, philosophy, everything in him was commonplace enough. But when he commanded, millions followed. All else may vanish, his institutions, even the memory of his campaigns: he will remain for ever "the virtuoso of power," as he defined himself to Roederer, the "poet in action," as

Chateaubriand called him, the supreme "Professor of Energy," in the words of Maurice Barrès. This is the one incontrovertible point upon which his enemies and his worshippers are agreed. No one, not even Tolstoy, ever accused Napoleon of being flabby.

But Will is a force: whither did that force tend? What ends did it serve? Such a question would be branded as sheer Philistinism by the mystics and the æsthetes of the Will. Energy, they would say, is magnificent in itself, apart from any consideration of usefulness or bourgeois morality. Niagara was no less sublime before it was harnessed. A volcano, a raging sea, a conflagration, are splendid spectacles: the awe they inspire is to be treasured, not appraised according to a pedantic code. Art, like Nature, is beyond good and evil. So far as the commonplace happiness of mankind is concerned, Napoleon was right in exclaiming: "It might have been better for the world if Rousseau and I had never existed." "Angel or Demon, what matters it?"—so ran a stock phrase of Romanticism. The sole criterion adequate to Napoleon's career is the one applied by the poet Laurent Tailhade to a bomb-throwing anarchist: "Who cares for the death of vague human beings? *The gesture was beautiful.*" This purely æsthetic appreciation of Napoleon's will is at the basis of his prestige with such men as Stendhal and Balzac; it is found as an all-important element in Victor Hugo, Barrès, Elie Faure; it carried away, at times, even political opponents like Joseph de Maistre and Chateaubriand, and pitiless analysts like Taine.

This would not be the place to challenge, even if we were so minded, the sacrosanct doctrine of Art for Art's sake. We are ready to concede that Beauty should have no purpose but its own realization, and that it should be enjoyed for itself alone. But every art has its limitations, imposed upon it by the material it employs. The force of gravity, which plays no part in painting, cannot be disregarded by the architect. Similarly, the collective, the social element, which the sculptor can

safely ignore, is an essential condition of the art whose inspiration is the Will, and whose medium is Action. A statue, created by a single man, enjoyed by a single man, would none the less exist in all its completeness: unearthed after three thousand years, its message could still be read on its lips. But for the Napoleonic artist, recognition is no mere reward, granted or withheld at the whim of fate: it is the very stuff he is working upon. His Will can be gauged only through its influence. It needs immediate influence, as imperiously as the sculptor's dream needs clay or marble.

In the Napoleonic art there enters therefore an element which other arts would scorn—the element of bigness. A medal may be of far greater æsthetic value than a colossus, a miniature than a fresco, a faultless sonnet than a lengthy epic, the Parthenon than a skyscraper; but what is an Emperor who rules over a few acres and a score of farm hands? Figaro may have shown more resourcefulness in keeping out of gaol than any prime minister in guiding the lumbering Empire of Spain; but no one will take his claim seriously. A brigand at the head of a small band, the lone footpad lurking at a street corner, may declare war upon society with all the eloquence of Byron and Nietzsche: they will not convince the world that they are Napoleons. Let us go one step farther: a madman asserts that he is Emperor, or God: there is nothing lacking in his Will to Power except that it fails to affect others. It needed as much daring for General Malet to plan and start his *coup* against the Empire as for Bonaparte to seize the reins of government on the 18th of Brumaire; yet Malet is now but an insignificant super in the mighty Napoleonic drama. What made Napoleon unique was his unique following. A man is not a conspirator, a bandit, or a lunatic when he is obeyed by forty million men.

So the Will cannot be recognized unless it bring authority with it. But, if such be the case, the religion of Action is hardly more than the worship of success, and to speak, in such a connection, of “art for art’s sake” is a bold

paradox, if not a sacrilege. This is the first flaw that can be detected in the Napoleonic cult : its devotees bow down to something which, in order to be appreciated, must be translated into terms of coarsest material power. The Will of Bonaparte was more respectable than that of the Jacobins whom he suppressed, because it could enforce respect through the irresistible argument of the firing squad. A few "dreamers" whom he packed off to the living death of Guiana have properly remained the laughing stock of history : they, too, had a will of their own, but he alone had his way.

II

Let us analyse more closely that Will of the great master of energy. Roughly as he dealt with minorities, it is none the less obvious that Napoleon did not impose his will for fifteen years through methods of terrorism. No "tyrant" could maintain himself so long on a European throne by such primitive means as force and deceit. With the majority of his contemporaries, the dictatorship of Napoleon was based on persuasion. They obeyed because his orders were reasonable : the prison and the guillotine were held in reserve only for a few obstinate cases. How, then, did he "impose his will" ? Did he substitute his private purposes for the purposes of silent millions ? Very seldom, and, if we were to believe him, never. The key to his mastery was that he identified his will with the common will. His total indifference to all principles and traditions, his absolute egotism became his chief virtues. They made him, for a while, a unique arbiter between warring factions, an ideal servant of the people. For he had truly no "purpose" of his own, no sectarian cause or *crochet* to serve, no class interest to promote : his sole desire was to retain and to expand his power. It did not much matter to him in what direction he exerted his authority, so long as authority was in his hands. He could order Mohammedans to obey their prophet with as straight a face as he ordered his Christian subjects to worship Christ : it was all one to him, just as Corsica,

Turkey, India, France, Europe, Revolution and Reaction, the Republic and the Empire, were for him exactly on the same plane. They were a stud of horses for his ambitions, and the best "cause" was the mount that would carry him farthest. To reach an ever increasing number of people, to inject his personality into ever more minute details of their lives, until a hundred million men would be brought up in the assurance that they breathed only by order and permission of His Majesty their Emperor and King: such was his goal. And he felt that such universal obedience could be reached only in one way—by ordering the inevitable. So this hero of the practical Will was strangely lacking in wilfulness. Idealists may obstinately pursue a distant vision: he, the realist, the opportunist, was concerned only with the next step. That is why his course was so devious: the soldier of the Revolution restored a throne, created a nobility, married an Austrian archduchess; the autocratic Emperor became in 1815 a parliamentary monarch, and in Saint Helena reverted to Democracy. He was all things to all men, because he owed no allegiance to any of their ideals.

So we come to the paradoxical conclusion that the will to dominate, in Napoleon, had absorbed even the desire to be himself. He did not impose his own thoughts upon the multitude: he tried to think the common thought. Like all recognized leaders, he was led (the fate of prophets, on the contrary, is not to lead, but to be stoned, burned, or stifled by the most expedient method that each age can devise). He followed—what? He called it his Star. For this Man of Destiny did not consider himself as the master, but as the slave, of his fate. Like the flamboyant puppets in Hugo's dramas, he was impelled towards a goal beyond his ken. "The greater a man," he wrote, "the less is the province of his *will*: he is dependent upon events and circumstances. . . . I am bond above all other men. My master is pitiless, for that master is the nature of things." Or again: "Wisdom and policy teach us to do what destiny dictates, and to go whither the irresistible trend of events leads us."

The obliteration of Self for the realization of absolute egotism, the abdication of the will as a condition of supreme energy: these contradictions are absurd only in the eyes of shallow logicians. We know that the greatest heroes of the Will are found among those who denied the freedom of the Will, Calvinists and Jansenists, for instance. For the slavery that is irksome and degrading is the petty slavery to the caprices of individuals. He who abandons himself consciously to an irresistible transcendent force is emancipated thereby from all human doubts and fears. Luther was never so independent as when he exclaimed, "So help me God, I can take no other course!" The strong man is the man who is *determined*, in both senses of the word.

III

Napoleon never attempted to define the force that compelled his action. He was Emperor by the grace of God and by the will of the people—a formula of magnificent plenitude. But he did not take that formula too seriously. He was too much of a realist to have any mystic belief in democracy, and, in spite of a few Romantic flights, he was too much of an eighteenth-century rationalist to consider himself as the lieutenant of God. That unknown power, of which his own was but the shadow, he called vaguely "Fate, Destiny, his Star, the Nature of Things." He never was a true Messiah, the confidant as well as the instrument of Providence. But posterity could not admit that the pilot who stared so fixedly ahead was sightless. They ascribed to him a foreknowledge of his course, a sense of his mission, that he himself repeatedly disclaimed. He discovered his "purpose" merely as a political convenience, when he was no longer able to act. If Fate had given him another chance, if he had been victorious at Waterloo, if he had escaped and triumphed again in 1820, he would soon have flung his "purpose" to the winds. Napoleon-Prometheus is a myth at which Napoleon on the throne

would have smiled, and to which his associates remained completely impervious.

It is greatness enough for a single man to have embodied for fifteen years the will of a nation. No doubt Napoleon was not an infallible instrument. In many cases he acted without warrant: there was no popular demand for the creation of an imperial nobility, for the Spanish adventure, for the Russian war. These were lapses that France seemed to condone only because she had no way of expressing disapproval. No doubt also much of the work that was done under him did not need his impulse or his guidance. Through conceit, and especially through policy, he lay claim to every achievement within the Empire—even when he had merely been the fly that buzzed about the horses' ears and took credit for pulling the coach over the hill. The rest of the world was long deluded by his advertising campaign, or deluded itself through the universal craving for hero-worship. Thackeray dissected the majestic entity Ludovicus Rex into Ludovicus, a bald, hook-nosed little gentleman, and Rex, an imposing wardrobe. A similar analysis, applied to Napoleon, takes away much of the glamour from his miraculous record. A jurist like Esmein tells us calmly that the First Consul cannot be considered as an important contributor to the Civil Code, the reader of Albert Sorrel will not retain any great admiration for Napoleon's diplomacy, nor the reader of Masson for the Emperor's private virtues. Even in war we find him no longer irresistible after he had exhausted or discouraged the personnel of his own generation, which he had not formed.

Still, these are mere qualifications: it is obvious that Napoleon was no ordinary sovereign, who is "graciously pleased" that victories be won or institutions created in his name. He was a dictator who actually dictated—King Stork, not King Log. There is much about the dictatorial method that is almost irresistibly attractive. Democracies, parliamentary regimes, governments clogged by a thick growth of traditions, are wasteful, slow-moving, and liable to spells of almost complete paralysis. Even

a mediocre man, if he were given supreme power, could decide more efficiently in a few minutes than a brilliant assembly of five hundred after weeks of eloquent debate. For, at any rate, he would decide. After the dismal chaos of partisan squabbles, leadership, any kind of leadership, is a great blessing, or at least a great relief. A people is thankful to the man who claims to know their minds because he knows his own. We remember the uneasy days of 1916, when America, untaught in foreign affairs, was waiting for the President's guidance, whilst the President, then a genuine Democrat, was waiting for "a clear mandate from the country." The situation reminded us of the famous Kansas law, according to which "when two trains are to cross at grade, each shall wait until the other shall have passed."

The Napoleonic regime, therefore, makes for a certain kind of efficiency, and that even when the head of the State is by no means a genius. The Second Empire was brilliantly successful for a longer period than the First; the Hohenzollern Empire had a splendid record for no less than forty-three years; and, for a third of a century, Diaz gave Mexico the externals at least of order and prosperity. In appraising Napoleon, we should bear in mind that Cæsarism almost invariably brings immediate and tangible results. The intrinsic advantages of the regime should be discounted from the merits of the man; even in the coarse hands of Augereau it is probable that pretorian rule, in 1800, would have contrasted favourably with the unsavoury muddle of the Directoire.

Yet the history of all these regimes reveals the same evolution: material prosperity and power, soulless mediocrity, disaster. The three terms are inseparably linked. There must be something radically wrong in a method which leads so inevitably to ignominious downfall.

The cause is not far to seek. In subserving the "common will" instead of the highest will, the Dictator is bound to find and to flatter the commonplace. Noble aspirations may be as universal as coarse appetites, but aspirations, still unrealized, are multiform, hazy, shifting,

hesitant; appetites are material, permanent, definite, unmistakable. No "ideal" ever will be a safe and sane platform: it is on the ground, not in the clouds, that a solid government must find its base. Napoleon could not be at the same time Chateaubriand, Madame de Staël, Lakanal, Lamarck, Carnot, and Lafayette. As "representative of the whole people," he could only be the average man on a gigantic scale, the formidable gendarme demanded by the coalition of vested interests—in other words, selfishness and vulgarity enthroned.

This, of course, is true of all governments. They cannot embody the best there is in a nation, but only what is common to all citizens; and what is common to all is purely and simply "common." But a liberal government escapes the curse of Napoleonism through its modesty. It frankly recognizes its own mediocrity. It applies itself to useful, material ends, leaving alone thought, art, religion, all the supreme things in life, which it cannot control nor even grasp. Such a government may be an excellent servant, because it does not attempt to be a master. There would have been no objection to Napoleon if he had contented himself with building roads and bridges, and collected, with a modest rake off, the indispensable taxes. But such a Napoleon—a business manager of unexampled efficiency, a Haussmann on a national scale—would not have created a myth. The Napoleon who still haunts us is the one who, in order to incarnate in himself the whole of the people, declared war on everything that was above the common level, the man who hampered or stifled all the vigorous individualities who did not fit into his huge and simple machine.

The machine worked for a while, not merely because it had been put together by a master hand and received its impulse from a master will, but because it was served by strong men. The bureaucracy of Napoleon would from the first have been as helpless as that of Spain or Austria, if its personnel had not been recruited among public servants grown vigorous in the stormy but bracing atmosphere of the Revolution. These men were originally

not the creatures but the associates of Bonaparte. They won victories for him in every field: in Daru, Mollien, Regnier, Roederer, civil administration had its Desaix, its Moreau, its Masséna. But in a surprisingly brief time independence was eliminated—for the smoother working of the machine and for the more exclusive glory of the master. And then Napoleon realized in his hour of need that he was what he had wanted to be, alone: alone with courtiers and valets, but without a lieutenant, without a minister, without a counsellor. The machine was still perfect, and the chief engineer almost equal to himself. But he had shut off the source of motive power. He was left, the average man *in excelsis*, with a stolid mass of average men, confronted with a desperate adventure which would have required the united efforts of giants.

How frequently have we heard it said that "Napoleonism would be an ideal government if only the right Napoleon could always be found." But Napoleonism is not even such a wild gamble as that: it contains in its principle the certainty of ultimate failure. For it is based on a lie: the tremendous Napoleonic bluff that a single man can represent, lead, or govern a nation. A man can only *pretend* that he is leading a nation, by ascribing to himself the credit of other men's work, and by suppressing all activities that refuse to be absorbed. And such a pretence can be kept up only by foul means. Public opinion, which cannot be fooled all the time even by the most gifted of advertisers, must be juggled away, and the army must be held as an *ultima ratio*. A shadowy Parliament, responsible editors in gaol, spurs clanking and sabres rattling ominously, such are the indispensable elements of Napoleonism, in France or in Germany, in Mexico or in Russia, and eke in Mussolinian Italy.

The most persistent delusion about Napoleon is that he could have acted otherwise, that nothing but a flaw in his character spoilt a unique opportunity and a splendid record. It was the fundamental fallacy of Thiers: the First Consul was admirable in every respect, the Emperor gradually yielded to his despotic propensities. Ah!

If we could find another Napoleon, and a Napoleon wise enough not to overstep the mark ! But such a mark does not exist : the Consul and the Emperor are one. In a clever advertisement for H. G. Wells's *History* we read : " He had an opportunity such as never came to a man before. France had put herself completely into his hands. The old order of things was dead or dying. The promise of a World Republic and a World Peace¹ whispered in a multitude of startled minds. Had he had any profundity of vision and power of creative imagination, had he been accessible to any disinterested motive, he might have done a work for mankind that would have made him the very sun of human history." He had no such opportunity, and he could have done no such work. For, if he had been the prophet that such a vision implies, he could not also have been the associate of the rotten politicians who prepared the 18th of Brumaire, and France would not have put herself into his hands. His chance was not the result of his genius alone, or of his genius served by miraculous luck : it came from a conjunction of genius, circumstances, and unscrupulous cunning. He seized power by unholy means, and could not use it for worthy ends. To dream of a Napoleon pure enough to be the servant of the ideal, yet " practical " enough to beat Siéyès and Barras at their own game, is to dream of a Chimæra. It is another version of the eternal Prudhommesque dictum : " Had Napoleon remained a mere lieutenant of artillery, he would still be on the throne." It is as demoralizing as the reasoning of a man who steals a fortune in order to be able, for the remainder of his life, to live in blameless honesty.

IV

There are two types of Napoleon-worshippers, very different in outward appearance, yet strangely similar at heart. The first is the " practical man," who boasts of his absolute contempt for ideology, idealism, and all

¹ Rather contradictory promises, at the time !

forms of pedantry or moonshine. Give him results, give him facts. Napoleon was the master of facts, such hard facts that Jacobinism, Royalism, Austria, Prussia, Russia were knocked senseless by their impact. And he could show results too : a fortune, a name, a code—institutions which are still alive. All that was illogical, coarse, immoral ? Meaningless words for the red-blooded man of action, the hard-headed man of affairs ! Let the theorist and the sentimentalist hold their peace !

The second is the artist, for whom the Empire is a work of surpassing beauty : a colourful, quick-moving spectacle of epic battles under varied skies ; in the background institutions rising up majestically like fairy palaces ; in the centre the supreme tragedy of a Will fighting alone against circumstances, and stilled at last by the veiled figure of Fate.

The apostle of efficiency should be reminded that the holocaust of millions did not save the Empire from complete failure. If an architect should rear a splendid edifice on inadequate foundations and with poor materials, the crowd might admire the glorious façade before it crashed down, but the expert would take note of a few lessons. That force and fraud are shifting soil, for one thing, and unable to bear any great load for long. That selfishness is but a rotten stone to build with, and will disintegrate during the first hard winter. And that one man's ambition provides no sufficient cement for a structure on a national scale. Whatever skill may have been shown in the erection of the crazy fabric, its fate, foretold by careful architects, suffices to condemn it. All that was impressive in Napoleon's creations—his title, his Court, his conquest—has failed to stand the test of time. The bureaucracy alone survives—an incubus that " practical " England or America would shudder to have fastened upon their shoulders.

To the Artist, we might say that a military drama is no doubt refreshing and picturesque, but hardly subtle and profound enough to rank with the noblest forms of art. Yet Napoleon without uniform, Napoleon unescorted

by plumed marshals on prancing horses, Napoleon as another Carnot, organizing victory from his modest office, would lose much of his prestige. The Will of the hero, at the service of no worthy cause, easily turning to persecution in times of prosperity and to pettishness in days of adversity, is notable for its volume rather than for its fine temper. It cannot be compared in quality with the will of a Dante, of a Shakespeare, of a Newton, of a Goethe, re-creating or re-discovering the world. Its power can be measured only through its action: and if that action was so wide, it was only because it had the qualities of a best seller: it was obvious and forcible.

“If Napoleon were to return,” says—in substance—a brilliant historian of the radical school, “who knows? I, too, might follow and cheer him.”

A wise, a generous admission. It is well not to wrap oneself too proudly in the philosopher’s cloak when there is no tyrant to offer persecution. “There, but for the grace of God, went I”: and will that grace be granted to-morrow?

But let us at least hope and pray that if the Emperor were prancing again down the Champs Elysées, we might not be found among the shouting crowd; and that the din of popular applause would not prevent us from reading in peace the noblest page in the French language:—

“Man is but a reed, the weakest in Nature; but he is a thinking reed. It is not necessary that the whole universe should arm itself in order to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water, would be sufficient to kill him. But even though the universe should crush him, man would still be nobler than that which is killing him, for he knows that he is dying, and the advantage that the universe has over him. The universe does not know.

“All our dignity therefore lies in our thought. It is upon that that we must depend, not upon space and time which we cannot fill. Let us therefore strive to think well: such is the foundation of moral life.”

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